

Divine Dyads
Ancient Civilization in Tibet

by

John Vincent Bellezza



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Illustrations

by

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LIBRARY OF TIBETAN WORKS AND ARCHIVES

First Edition 1997

Computer Typesetting:
Jigme Tsering, Tenzin Sonam and Tenzin Yangchen

ISBN: 81-86470-19-0

Published by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, H. P. (India) and printed at Indraprastha Press (CBT), 4, Bahadurshah Zafar Marg, New Delhi - 110 002.

DEDICATION

To my parents John and Paula

Foreword

In the remote past, the country called Zhang zhung was known as a great empire throughout the Orient. Other civilizations have left behind ruins that have been excavated as evidence of their existence but because Zhang zhung was basically a nomadic civilization few traces of its physical presence remain. The history of Zhang zhung, however, has been preserved in both Bon and Buddhist traditions. These sources mention the places where the people of Zhang zhung lived and indicate the mountains and lakes that they considered sacred. The whole of Tibet in ancient times was known as the 'Three Regions of Zhang zhung': Outer—sGo; Inner—Phugs; and Central—Bar. At that time, the region of Outer Zhang zhung included most of the territories of northeast Tibet; the region of Inner Zhang zhung covered not only Gu ge and Khyung lung in Western Tibet but also countries that today belong to India such as Ladakh, Lahoul, Kullu, etc.

Zhang zhung is the source of Tibetan culture and history. The study of Zhang zhung is extremely important if we are to understand the antiquity, unique nature and universal importance of Tibetan culture, past and present.

The work of John V. Bellezza, *Divine Dyads: Ancient Civilization in Tibet* clarifies the present locations of the sacred places and the characteristics and historical background of the Zhang zhung civilization.

I believe deeply that this wonderful work of John V. Bellezza makes a major contribution to understanding the value of ancient Tibetan culture and helps us discover how Tibetan culture and history is related to the sacred mountains and lakes of the Zhang zhung empire.

Choegyal Namkhai Norbu

Publisher's Note

The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives is pleased to be publishing. *Divinc Dyads: Ancicnt Civilization of Tibct* by author and explorer John V. Bellezza. The Divine Dyads, the lake and mountain pairs of gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho, and rTa rgo rin po che and Dang ra g.yu mtsho, are analyzed in terms of prehistoric significance, cultural and religious history, and in relation to the civilization of the Byang thang region of Tibet; specifically during the Zhang zhung period.

The author traces the significance of each of the Dyad personalities, individually and collectively, from their nature-based origins, through their incorporation in Bon and Buddhist tenets, into the contemporary vision of the deities in popular and literary culture. The deities are compasses along which the cultural, social, environmental and religious development of the region can be ascertained.

This research provides important insights into ancient Byang thang civilization, and is a stepping stone towards further discoveries concerning the origins and development of Tibetan culture. We hope that, with some of the new interpretations presented here by the author, readers will find this book interesting and that it will expand the unfortunately scant knowledge of ancient Tibetan civilization.

Gyatsho Tshering, Director
Library of Tibetan Works and Archives
July 1997

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the collaboration of many fine people from various walks of life, who willingly devoted time and energy to help me in every stage of the book. Although I have a working knowledge of the rudiments of the Tibetan language, to which I have had recourse over the last 14 years, I am not a professional translator and, therefore, sought expertise in unlocking the meaning of Tibetan texts. The co-operation of people in this area was extremely noteworthy, not least of all because this was voluntary. I ask the reader to bear with any shortcomings and inadequacies of this book, all of which should rest squarely on my shoulders.

Foremost among those who assisted me and whose help was indispensable were Gyalwa Menri Khenpo Lungtog Tenpai Nyima, Lobpon Tenzin Namdag, and Chado Rinpoche, with whom I had the great privilege of working over the past five years.

Menri Khenpo (Gyal ba sman ri'i khri 'dzin mkhan rabs so gsum pa, Lung rtogs bstan pa'i nyi ma), the distinguished supreme leader of the Bon religion, whose headquarters is situated in Dolanji, Himachal Pradesh, India, kindly took time out of his extremely busy schedule to render invaluable help. He personally endeavored to answer my many questions and provide guidance. Moreover, he deputed members of his highly competent staff to provide me with assistance. I extend my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to Menri Khenpo and his staff.

Lobpon Tenzin Namdag (sLop dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag), widely recognized as the foremost Bon scholar, is based at the Khri brtan nor bu rtse Monastery in Ichangu, Kathmandu. Despite his engaged schedule, this sincere and modest man repeatedly offered his assistance. This superb scholar is the unrivaled expert on the Divine Dyads.

Chado Rinpoche (Bya do rin po che bsTan 'dzin 'byung gnas) was born at gNam mtsho, Tibet, and is the titular head of the Bya do dgon pa at gNam mtsho. Although Bya do rin po che has sadly spent little time in Tibet, his razor-sharp intellect and inquisitive mind have insured that he mastered the history and culture of gNam mtsho. Bya do rin po che, a dGe lugs pa scholar who graduated with the highest honors, currently the abbot of rNam rgyal grwa tshang in Dharamsala, devoted countless hours towards making this book a reality. His learning, kindness and humility were a constant inspiration and helped to smooth the long and difficult road to the creation of this book.

Very special thanks are due to my wife Rebecca Claire for her excellent illustrations of cave paintings and landscapes as well as for the cover photograph. Her tireless support during the compilation of this book is much appreciated. My gratitude also goes out to Arthur King, a retired professional artist, for his illustrations of deities, landscapes and the rTa rgo range profile map.

I am very grateful to Choegyal Namkhai Norbu for his interest in my work and for kindly writing the Foreword to this book. I would also like to specifically thank Professor

Per Kvaerne for taking the time and trouble to look at early stages of the book and for his insightful guidance and comments. Among the many other people who have helped me is Thubten Rikey, a scholar of great ability and modesty. His help, good will and friendship are especially noteworthy. Without his textual expertise, insights and sense of humor, my efforts would have been seriously impeded. I am also indebted to the Bon scholar Namgyal Nyima Dagkar who not only generously gave me copies of four excellent articles of his own on Bon before they were published, but also helped me in a timely manner with translations. Additionally, he inspected the manuscript for spelling errors and inconsistencies, a task which consumed many hours. Four young but fully qualified and gifted Bon scholars also demand special mention: Latri Khenpo Nyima Dragpa, Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung, Kongtrul Rinpoche Tenzin Namgyal and Lobpon Trinle Nyima. These four scholars, who work under the auspices of Menri Khenpo and Lobpon Rinpoche, helped with translations and answered many questions. It was a joy to work with these exceptional men.

Special thanks also go to Gurchung Rinpoche, a rNying ma scholar and Chadur Sonam Sangpo, a Bon po scholar, who found time to answer my incessant questions. Thanks must also go to a variety of friends and mentors who were instrumental in bringing this book to fruition, among whom are the following: Stan Armington, Kenji Babasaki, Bob Brundage, Geshe Champa Losal, Drubpa Tharchin, Ven. Gendo Drag, Gochung Rinpoche, Melvin Goldstein, Gyurme Dorje, Ven. Kelsang Choedag, Ven. Kelsang Gyaltshan, Lahoul Tshering Dorje, Lobsang Shastri, Lobsang Tenzin, Gary McCue, Dan Miller, Namkhai Dorje, Ven. Nyida Tshewang, Khenpo Nyima Wanggyal, Ven. Guru Oser, Pasang Wangdu, Bradley Rowe, George Schaller, Shentshang Rinpoche, Rupert Smith, Sonam Dargye, Acharya Sonam Wangdu, Sonam Wangdu, Taglung Matrul Rinpoche, Taglung Tsetrul Rinpoche, Tashi Tshering, Tenzin Chagdor, Geshe Tenzin Drugdag, Ven. Tenzin Tshultrim, Tshering Dorje Burangwa, Ven. Tshultrim Rabgye, Susil Upadhaya, Yacob Urban, Roberto Vitali, Emil Wendel, Ted Worcester and Ven.Yungdrung Gyaltshan. I would also like to thank Tashi Norbu for his illustrations.

This book would never have been realized without the charity and cooperation of scores of people in Tibet who offered information, advice, and logistical support. They are the unsung heroes of this book and must, for the time being, remain so. From the bottom of my heart I thank and salute them. Thanks must also go out to numerous officials in the dPal mgon county, Nag chu Prefectural and Xizang Provincial goverments for their assistance, encouragement, and graciousness.

Last but not least, I want to thank the editorial staff of the LTWA including Maura Ginty, Vyvyan Cayley, Toby Williamson, Alex Taylor, Tenzin Sonam, Tenzin Yangchen and Jigme Tsering for all their hard work. I would also like to thank the LTWA librarians Pema Yeshe, Geshe Tashi Wanggyal and the rest of the library staff. These dedicated staff were indispensable in making this book a reality.

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INTRODUCTION

The Nature of the Divine Dyads

Dyad is a word of Greek origin which denotes the two units, objects or personalities that make up a pair. Divine, a word of Latin origin, means being or having the nature of a deity. Although there are innumerable dyads in Tibet, in the context of this study Divine Dyads refers specifically to two pairs of mountain and lake deities: gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha, and Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo rin po che. This includes all their manifestations and elaborations as well as their geographical delimitation. The common mythological denominator and theme, irrespective of time and individual tradition, is that each mountain and lake are coupled. However, this relationship between the mountain and lake of each Divine Dyad varies greatly and is dependent on time and context.

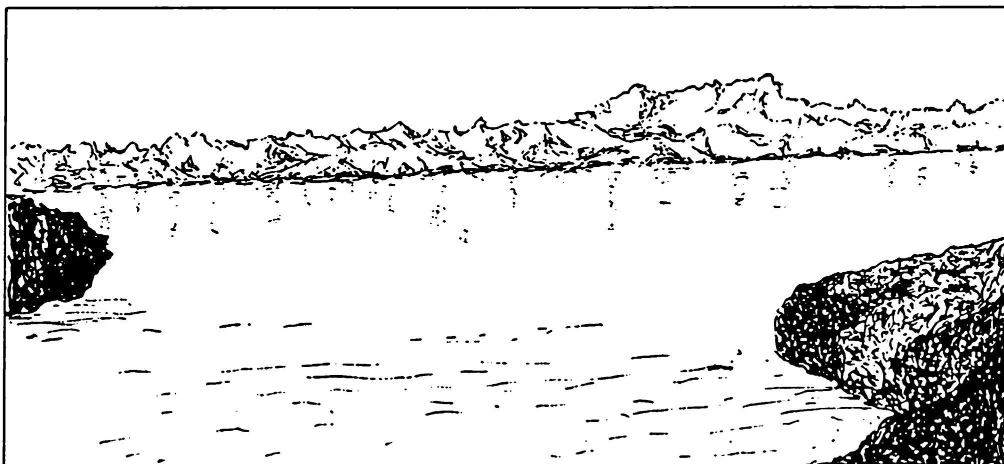
This pairing of mountains and lakes takes on various forms defined by the particular perspective from which they are viewed. Textual, oral and personal perspectives each affect the manner in which this pairing is described and conceived. The literal translation of Divine Dyad in Tibetan, rtsa chen cha, is not used as an appellation. General synonyms in Tibetan for the Divine Dyads include: 1) yab yum (father/mother—consorts), 2) ri mtsho (mountain/lake), 3) lcam dral (sister/brother—wife/husband), and 4) mtsho brag (lake/rock). It must be added that these synonyms are not only applied to the Divine Dyads but have other applications in Tibetan culture and sacred geography. The relevance of these terms to the Divine Dyads is primarily that they establish a reciprocal and indivisible relationship between each lake and mountain.

In both of the Dyads here discussed, the male aspect is embodied by the mountain gNyan chen thang lha or rTa rgo rin po che. While there are mountains in Tibet of female gender, the two mountains of this study are male and they seem to have always been seen as such. Conversely, the gender of the lakes gNam mtsho and Dang ra g.yu mtsho is always thought of as female. This male/female assignment of gender is common in Tibet. The maleness of the two mountains and the femaleness of the two lakes are formative elements in the diverse mythological and religious traditions that arose around them.

On the 1,300-kilometer-long Byang thang there are three major pairs of sacred mountains and lakes which crown its eastern, central and western sections. In the east is gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha; in the center, Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo; and in the west, mTsho ma pham and Gangs ti se. They ornament and circumscribe

the northern plains of Tibet and constitute the three most sacred and celebrated mountains and the three most sacred and well-known lakes on the entire Byang thang. Each of these Dyads is also important in terms of the Byang thang resource base and local economic activity, which are not unrelated to their sanctified status. As well as being prominent in the numinous landscape of the Byang thang, the three Dyads also have economic, geographical and cultural relevance in Tibet as a whole.

These three major pairs of mountains and lakes on the Byang thang were unified into one sacred geographical tradition known as the gNas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum.[1] This tradition, which is associated with the Bon religion, calls each of the three Dyads ri mtsho. It has become extremely obscure. There is apparently not a single text in existence that treats it specifically.[2] The origins of this Byang thang-based sacred geographical

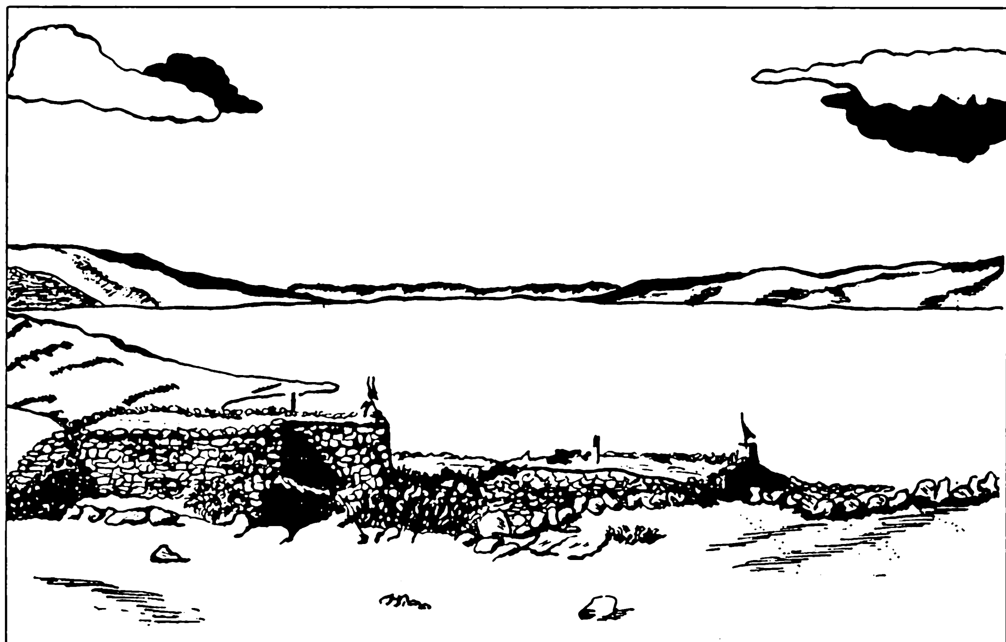


gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho from Bya do

tradition seem to lie in the pre-Imperial period Zhang zhung kingdom which straddled the Byang thang. The gNas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum correspond to the g.yon sgo (left door), an important geographical subdivision of Zhang zhung. Without concrete historical evidence it is very difficult to assess the significance of this tradition. However, because the prominent g.yon sgo territories of Zhang zhung and the gNas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum are virtually synonymous and both are important to the Bon religion, we can surmise that the gNas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum developed as a flagship of the Zhang zhung sacred geographical tradition. Just as other historical sacred geographical traditions used to demarcate large swathes of territory, it is also worth considering the possibility that the gNas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum functioned to define and enhance the political base of Zhang zhung.

In order to limit the size and scope of this book, it was decided to omit a detailed examination of the cultural history of Gangs ti se and mTsho ma pham, the most famous of the three Dyads.[3] Because of this Dyad's fame both within and outside of Tibet, and

the sizable body of primary and secondary literature devoted to them, there was little incentive to rework what has been already published or discussed at length. Nevertheless, parallels and interrelationships between the two Dyads of this book and Gangs ti se and mTsho ma pham are explored wherever appropriate. This Dyad shares some of its sacred geography, as well as a good portion of its history, culture and physical environment with the two Dyads of this work.[4]



Dangra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo rin po che from Gangs lung

In the vast and largely unstudied matrix of Byang thang sacred geography, the three Dyads are the hubs which co-ordinate and rule over a plethora of minor sacred topographical entities. This tri-polar system dominates the sacred geography of the Byang thang, forging it into a unified whole. This is an important factor in keeping the gNas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum tradition alive, despite the loss of whatever ancient political connotations it once might have had. The wide plains and broad valleys of the Byang thang have an atmospheric quality about them and require some way to differentiate and quantify them. The Dyads provide such a perceptual benchmark.

The two Dyads of this study, gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha, and Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo rin po che, share many common links apart from being members of the obscure Bon gNas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum. The deities associated with the two Dyads bear close resemblance to one another, especially in their most primitive form as rulers and progenitors of the cosmos and the pantheon of elemental spirits.

Another commonality among the Dyads is the manner in which the lamaist religions, Bon and Buddhism, strove to redefine them to conform with their own doctrines, values and beliefs. Both religions relied on the same kinds of tactics and stratagems to bring the mountains and lakes into their fold. The result was that the Dyads became for both Bon and Buddhism worldly protectors of religion, albeit in close correspondence with hierarchically superior deities. This melding of the identities of worldly elemental spirits with higher deities that have passed beyond the sphere of transmigratory existence is a hallmark of the religious tradition of the Dyads.

There are a number of other ways in which the two Dyads resemble one another. They share a common ground as clan protectors (rus rgyud lha), genealogical deities (A pha'i lha) and ancestral deities (mes lha) for the inhabitants of the Byang thang. The Dyads are also important in the cult of spirit-mediums which act as mouthpieces or oracles for worldly deities. Few other mountains in Tibet (ie. Tibetan Autonomous Region)[5] are as celebrated in the folk oracular tradition. Another link between the Dyads is their influential role in the history of Zhang zhung. Few other places on the Byang thang have such a density of archaeological sites purported to date from that time. Since the fall of Zhang zhung in the 7th or 8th century, the Dyads have receded in historical importance and many of their interconnections have been severed. Despite the loss of national significance, the Dyads have remained core areas on the Byang thang.

Overview

Divine Dyads: Ancient Civilization in Tibet is an interdisciplinary study designed to pave the way for additional investigation of the literature, history, archaeology and anthropology of the Byang thang. The book is compiled from four kinds of sources, giving it a wide scope: 1) Tibetan textual sources, 2) written sources in other languages, 3) oral sources of information, and 4) field surveys.

The charting of the course of history through the indigenous cultural fabric of the two study areas is designed to provide a perspective on the foundation and development of Tibetan civilization. The historical period began in Tibet in the 7th century and an understanding of the country's heritage prior to that is sparse. A systematic approach and methodology for elucidating prehistoric culture has not yet been formulated, nor have many inroads been made in this area. This exposition of the indigenous religious heritage of gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha, and Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo rin po che is a step towards developing a firm base for the study of Tibetan prehistory. Through the annals of cultural development, Tibetans have adhered to a belief system that deifies the natural environment, coloring their perception, and helping to mold their metaphysical and ethical structures.[6] Accordingly, a bridge of tradition linking all periods of the Tibetan cultural legacy is intact to some degree. The goal of this book is to traverse that bridge by surveying Byang thang culture holistically, thus contributing to

our understanding of the origins of Tibetan civilization.

Indigenous religious traditions were not necessarily terminated with the founding of the modern lamaist religions of Buddhism and Bon and the period of recorded history. On the contrary, these indigenous traditions continue to thrive in the contemporary period. The indigenous popular religion—the amorphous body of folk tradition and belief connected to the divinity and sentient qualities of natural objects and phenomena—has always managed to adapt. As such, the deification of meteorological and celestial phenomena, topographical features, and animal and plant life remains a cornerstone of the Tibetan faith. The very character of a way of life directly dependent on the natural environment ensured the survival of traditions and symbolism derived from it. Each major economic, social and cultural transition of Tibetan civilization has posed its challenges to the prevailing religious sentiments, customs and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Throughout the ages an environment-based livelihood reinforced an environment-based ethic and belief system, which is still recognizable in contemporary religious expression.

Oral sources of information proved especially valuable in reference to the popular traditions surrounding the Divine Dyads,[7] and were also crucial in corroborating, supplementing and clarifying data obtained from literary sources. Nevertheless, most of the information regarding the personality, mythography and iconography of the Divine Dyads was obtained from written sources. The Tibetan literary sources used in this work can be broadly classified as follows: gsol kha (entreaties), bskang ba (offerings and blandishments), gnas bshad (guide books), dkar chag (registries of sacred places), rnam thar (biographies) chos 'byung (religious histories) and lo rgyus (histories).

The Objectives

We will examine, through the lens of indigenous religion, changes in the fundamental make-up of culture brought on by the introduction of Buddhism. The emergence in the 7th century of this doctrinally and philosophically advanced religion had a major impact on Tibetan culture. A key objective of this book is to explore the complex relationship between Buddhism and the indigenous religion at the Dyad in relation to Byang thang cultural development. In order to elucidate the rich tapestry of cultural history, the role of lamaist religions in the study area is carefully considered, with special attention being paid to the way these more recently introduced religious traditions diverged from the indigenous substrate of beliefs.

Essentially, the sacred geography under consideration consists of four topographs: gNam mtsho, gNyan chen thang lha, Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo rin po che. In Tibetan religion and attendant mythology, these four topographical features are invested with multifaceted personalities that have developed over millennia. A major objective of this study is the examination of a large range of literary and oral traditions as they pertain to these deified natural objects. The traditions of the popular religion, Bon, and

the various sects of Buddhism are illuminated and their components compared and contrasted. In this way an integral picture of the personality, iconography, history and cultural function of these personified natural features is reconstructed.

The character of the mountains and lakes under consideration in this work is scrutinized within the various chronological and sectarian demarcations. The role of these topographical entities in the ethical, political, social and religious systems of the Tibetan people is also explored. As the book unfolds it will become clear that the mountain and lake deities, by and large, mirror the cultural history of the Byang thang.

Also reviewed is the effect of the two pairs of deities on the social psychology of the Tibetans who dwell around them and the responses they have developed in order to cope with these natural nemeses. These responses inevitably involved ritual and devotional exercises that arose from the physical and cultural environment of the mountains and lakes. This work will investigate these reactions to the challenges of coping with the perennial questions of survival, order and regulation at the Dyad sites.

A hermeneutical approach to Tibetan literary sources is pursued in this work. To merely describe the relevant literature without attempting to analyze its significance to the development of culture and history on the Byang thang would have proven a gross under-utilization of the available material. Moreover, the accurate interpretation of literary traditions relating to the Dyads was called for, since a lacuna exists in this area of Tibetan studies. For example, iconography informs us about the appearance of a deity but says little of the processes and motivations behind its creation. To fully probe the literary record, a comparative and analytical perspective has been employed.

The pairs of mountain and lake deities do not stand in isolation to other topographical entities but are organically related to the plains, lakes, mountains, watercourses and caves around them. The environment of the study area as a whole had to be considered, in order to render a complete picture of the breadth and impact of the Dyads. The focus remains on the two pairs of mountains and lakes, but one is continually reminded that the network of shared tradition extends to surrounding regions in an often seamless interface.

Locations surveyed include sacred topographical sites, monasteries and hermitages, archaeological sites, villages, encampments and administrative facilities. An effort was made to visit every population center but, due to the vastness of the study area and other logistical concerns, this could not be realized. Most monasteries and hermitages were visited and surveyed. The survey of monasteries was supplemented by literary sources wherever possible. Information on archaeological sites was primarily obtained in the field. Both rock art and ruins were surveyed.

By utilizing the mountains and lakes as a template and focus of enquiry, critical aspects of the cultural history of the Dyads are unlocked. The emphasis is not on economic or political history, although these topics overlap, and thus these are treated peripherally. Until there is a coherent exposition of the economic and political history of the Dyads to complement this cultural history, a key chapter remains unwritten.

Sacred Geography

Most fundamentally, sacred geography can be defined as topography imbued with divinity.[8] Sacred geography embraces the full spectrum of deified and otherwise sanctified landforms and places associated with divinities, religious practitioners, sacred traditions and miraculous events. It does not refer to a specific tradition or cultural process but rather is a generic term for any environment or locale which is invested with supernatural or holy qualities. The origins of sacred geographical features are varied and the factors that make physical objects holy are complex. Historical precedents, personal perspectives and experiences, and the willingness of Tibetans to elevate, personify and deify their environment are all involved. A corollary of blessed landscapes are places labelled inauspicious, dangerous or evil. These places are the antithesis of sacred geography and, this opposition notwithstanding, similar cultural processes are implicated in their genesis.

The sanctity and majesty of the Tibetan landscape is captured in this ancient eulogy (Karmay 1994b: 112):

> Tibet is high and its land is pure.
> Its snowy mountains are at the head of everything,
> The sources of innumerable rivers and streams,
> It is the center of the sphere of the gods.

Throughout the course of this study, the sacred geography of the Dyads as it relates to the overall tradition in Tibet will be investigated. There is one area of Tibetan sacred geography, however, that deserves separate treatment due to its subtle persuasiveness, and that is the area of aesthetics. In Tibet, aesthetics plays a pivotal role in the infusion of natural features with divinity. Undoubtedly, the sublime beauty and inherent attractions of the natural world contribute to the holiness of the Dyads. The magnificence of the landscape is a common theme in many Tibetan texts as well as oral narratives. The beauty of the landscape of the Dyads is often expressed in the sentiments of the native people, reinforcing the loyalty and affection they feel for their home land. As one sngags pa and his followers at gNam mtsho succinctly put it:

> We love our land because it provides us with all our needs. It is a fine land with many great qualities, beautiful and noble, and rich in history.

A poem written by Bya do rin po che in 1996 eloquently sums up the aesthetic vision and admiration that the pastoralists of the Byang thang have for gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho:

> Gangs dkar shel gyi lhun por A yig bkra,
> Ngo mtshar yon tan 'khyil ba'i dwangs pa'i mtsho.
> Srid na snyan par grag pa'i gnas gang der.

Thang lha gnam mtsho bzhugs pa skal pa'i bzang.

(White mountain, great heap of crystal with the impression of the [mystic] letter A,
lake of purity circumscribed with marvellous properties.
These holy places are gloriously renowned in all the world.
It is highly fortunate that Thang lha and gNam mtsho abide here.)

The Dyads are among the most spectacular places in Tibet. Along with Gangs ti se, they are the triple crown ornament of the Byang thang. gNyan chen thang lha and rTa rgo, scintillating snowy giants, change their mood and appearance with every swing in the dynamic weather of the Byang thang. Their Olympian heights can be seen from many miles around and thus command the attention of all who behold them. Their forbidding, yet indescribably attractive, upper reaches inspire and move people today as they have down through the ages.

gNam mtsho and Dang ra g.yu mtsho, on the other hand, are vast bodies of limpid water that shine with a radiance unmatched by smaller or less altitudinous lakes. Their intense tonal quality cannot be duplicated. Their inimitable color and texture change with the weather and the light of the rising and setting sun. At midday when the sky is clear, they don the deepest shade of cobalt blue. The presence of clouds, or the sun at more oblique angles, create lakes of a gem-like turquoise, azure or aquamarine hue. At dawn and dusk the lakes blaze with gold or silver, casting an almost blinding refulgence. During the many storms on the Byang thang the lakes become boundless, brooding, inky black seas. Form, color and light mix and play at the Dyads in a unique and mysterious way, producing an effect that is unforgettable and profoundly stirring.

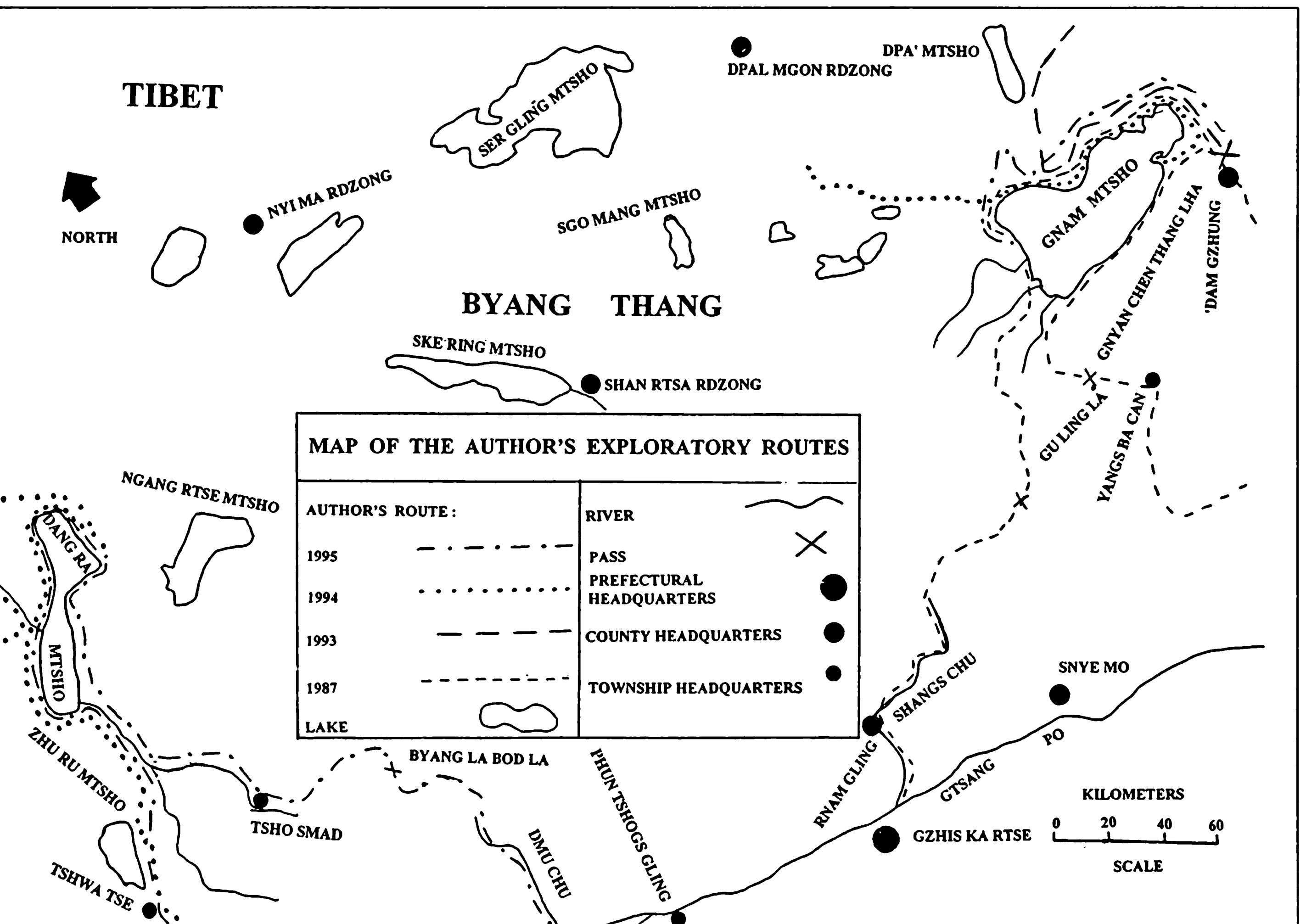
The exquisite beauty of the Divine Dyads deeply impresses both local inhabitants and visitors and is part of Tibet's great legacy of pristine nature. The beauty of the Tibetan landscape is a frequent subject of the songs of Tibet's most revered yogin, Mi la ras pa. The following verses are taken from a biography of the saint (Beyer 1974: 74-76):

This mountain land is a joyful place
a land of meadows and bright flowers

...and in such solitude as this
the cotton-clad Mi la finds joy

I am a yogin who wanders on the glacial peaks
reaching out to the spreading horizon

The famous turn-of-the-century explorer Sven Hedin was frustrated three times in his attempts to reach Dang ra g.yu mtsho (something he regretted bitterly). As a consolation, he was able to view the holy lake from a distance (Hedin 1909 vol.2: 26-29; Hedin 1934: 226). When Hedin finally did get to see rTa rgo at close quarters, he was sufficiently impressed. He wrote (Hedin 1909 vol.2: 20):



TIBET
NORTH
SER GLING MTSHO
DPAL MGON RDZONG
DPA' MTSHO
NYI MA RDZONG
SGO MANG MTSHO
GNAM MTSHO
GNYAN CHEN THANG LHA
'DAM GZHUNG
BYANG THANG
SKE RING MTSHO
SHAN RTSA RDZONG
GU LING LA
YANGS BA CAN
MAP OF THE AUTHOR'S EXPLORATORY ROUTES
AUTHOR'S ROUTE:
1995
1994
1993
1987
LAKE
RIVER
PASS
PREFECTURAL HEADQUARTERS
COUNTY HEADQUARTERS
TOWNSHIP HEADQUARTERS
NGANG RTSE MTSHO
DANG RA
MTSHO
ZHU RU MTSHO
TSHWA TSE
TSHO SMAD
BYANG LA BOD LA
DMU CHU
PHUN TSHOGS GLING
RNAM GLING
SHANGS CHU
SNYE MO
GTSANG PO
GZHIS KA RTSE
KILOMETERS
0
20
40
60
SCALE

> ...and suddenly the whole grand mountain appeared in its dazzling whiteness, shining like a lighthouse over the sea of the plateau, in a mantle of firm fields and blue glistening ice, and rising bold and sharply against the sky of purest azure blue.

In the same work, after his glimpse of Dang ra, Hedin writes wistfully (Hedin 1909 vol. 2: 31,32):

> ...I left the Dangra-yum-tso to its fate, the dark blue waters to the blustering storm and the song of the rising waves, and the eternal snowfields to the whisper of the winds. May the changing colors of the seasons, the beauty of atmospheric effects of light and shade, gold, purple, and gray, pass over Padma Sambhava's lake amidst rain and sunshine, as already for untold thousands of years...

The Divine Dyad Expeditions

Field studies of the Divine Dyads were made so that textual information could be corroborated with empirical data and to broaden the scope of investigation beyond the confines of the existing primary and secondary literary sources of data. First-hand acquaintance with the objects of the study provided special opportunities for an analysis of the cultural history of the region by constantly opening new avenues of exploration and enquiry.

This book was dependent on the input of scores of Tibetans, who could only be found on site. The guidance, cooperation and erudition of the Tibetans, as manifested in many hundreds of conversations, interviews and discourses, form the essential basis of this book. Most of the orally based data was obtained in the study areas, but was significantly enriched by Tibetans living outside their bounds. At the Dyad sites selection of prospective interviewees was largely determined by the exigencies of time and place. The peripatetic nature of the surveys was highly amenable to meeting a large cross-section of residents.

I made seven journeys to the study areas between 1987 and 1995. With few exceptions, these expeditions were carried out on foot and unaccompanied. In total, I walked approximately 3,300 kilometers during these expeditions. Walking is unmatched in terms of flexibility and minimizes environmental and cultural impact. Travelling on foot and alone is an age old and respected undertaking in Tibet. Hence, Tibetans saw me as a pilgrim, which encouraged them to extend their help and hospitality to me.

A major impetus to my explorations came in the way of a letter from the eminent Tibetologist H. E. Richardson, which reached a group of us living in Lhasa in February 1987. In it H. E. Richardson expressed interest in pyramids discovered by Pandit Kishen Singh on the north shore of gNam mtsho (see Chapter Five). I made the first and second expeditions between March and June of 1987 at gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha, setting the tempo and laying groundwork for further study. On the first excursion

to gNam mtsho, I trekked with five friends via the Gu ling la, a pass chronicled in Heinrich Harrier's *Seven Years in Tibet*. On the second expedition, I reverted to travelling alone. These early expeditions were particularly concerned with geographical exploration and the corroboration of some of the findings of the explorer Kishen Singh 115 years earlier. The third expedition, conducted in July and August 1993, also focused on gNam mtsho and the regions north of it, initiating the long process of systematically collecting ethnographic and archaeological data. In June 1994, I mounted a fourth expedition to gNam mtsho and areas to the west. In August and September of 1994, on the fifth expedition, I visited Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo rin po che for the first time. In June and July of 1995, on the sixth and final expedition to gNam mtsho, I completed a survey of local cave art. In August and September of the same year, I revisited Dang ra g.yu mtsho and Mount rTa rgo and managed to complete a circuit of the lake, and expanding the data base I compiled the previous year.

The Physical Geography of the Divine Dyads

gNyan chen thang lha at 7,111 meters is the tallest mountain in a series of ranges that straddle the breadth of Tibet, from Gangs rin po che in the west to dPal 'bar county in the east.[9] These discontinuous ranges of mountains, running from 81′ W to 95′ W, were coined the "Trans-Himalaya" by Sven Hedin, a name still frequently in use today. The Trans-Himalaya, parallel the Himalaya, bisecting Tibet into northern and southern halves. In turn, the Trans-Himalaya are often divided into western and eastern sections, called the Gangs dkar and gNyan chen thang lha ranges respectively. The presence of lofty mountains parallel to the Himalaya intensifies the rain shadow effect, creating steppe and desert conditions in areas north of the range.

The lofty gNyan chen thang lha massif is situated between 90° 30′ W to 90° 42′ W and 30° 18′ N to 30° 27′ N, 100 kilometers northwest of Lhasa. The Trans-Himalaya forms the southern border of the Byang thang (Northern Plains) of Tibet, an almost 700,000 square kilometer mountain-studded plateau averaging 5,000 meters in elevation.[10] gNyan chen thang lha is located in the most impenetrable section of the Trans-Himalaya, a heavily glaciated portion of the range that stretches northeast and southwest from the massif 100 kilometers in each direction. Unlike the pointed Gangs ti se or Mount rTa rgo, gNyan chen thang lha is a flat-topped mountain with a long summit ridge.

gNam mtsho is the largest lake on the Byang thang and the second largest on the Tibetan (i.e., Xizang-Qinghai) plateau, after mTsho sngon po in A mdo (Qinghai). gNam mtsho covers nearly 2,000 square kilometers of the southeast corner of the Byang thang and is over 80 kilometers long. gNam mtsho is one of 100 major lakes—more than 10,000 all told—that spread out across the Byang thang. This lake belt, formed by glacial action, is sometimes called the Great Lakes of Tibet.[11] Although less pronounced, the lake belt extends into adjacent areas of the Qinghai plateau as well. The gNyan chen thang lha

range forms the eastern and southern margins of the approximately 3,500 square kilometer gNam mtsho drainage basin.[12] gNam mtsho owes its existence to gNyan chen thang lha and the vast supplies of fresh water locked in its glaciers and watershed. The proximity of gNam mtsho to gNyan chen thang lha constitutes the physical basis of the Dyad. gNam mtsho is situated in 'Dam gzhung and dPal mgon counties of the Nag chu prefecture, forming one of the most important hydrological resources on the Byang thang. Although it is mildly brackish, the water of gNam mtsho is potable unlike that of most lakes on the Byang thang.

rTa rgo rin po che is a 45-kilometer-long mountain range consisting of nine mountain peaks. Its co-ordinates are 30° 24′ N to 30° 46′ N and 86° 22′ W to 86° 36′ W. The rTa rgo range is the highest part of a larger range that runs transverse to the main axis of the Trans-Himalaya for 200 kilometers (30° N to 31° 45′ N). Sven Hedin aptly described this chain of mountains as a meridian range.[13] The rTa rgo range, one of the most remote parts of the Trans-Himalaya, is situated approximately 480 kilometers east of Gangs rin po che and 380 kilometers west of gNyan chen thang lha in the center of the Byang thang. Its glaciated peaks represent an extremely valuable hydrological resource in this part of the Byang thang, watering innumerable pastures and giving rise to scores of streams and springs.

Dang ra g.yu mtsho, situated directly north of the rTa rgo range, is the third largest lake on the Byang thang. Although it is as long as gNam mtsho or Ser gling mtsho, it is smaller in area than either of these lakes. Dang ra is almost completely ringed by snow and glaciated peaks which continually recharge it with fresh water. However, despite the presence of the mountains, Dang ra has become a saline body of water. Thousands of years of evaporation have caused soluble levels of minerals to increase, making the water barely drinkable. Dang ra g.yu mtsho, like gNam mtsho, has no outlet. As with all but the east and west margins of the Byang thang, the lake drains internally within the closed basin system of the northern plateau. Remote and self-contained, the Great Lakes of the Byang thang constitute a unique highland ecosystem.

Problems Concerning the Classification of Time

In studies of prehistoric Tibetan culture, chronology raises a difficulty. Due to a dearth of information in the fields of archaeology, philology and prehistory, no resolution has been forthcoming. Certain issues related to the chronology of Tibetan civilization are cited below.

In the study of Chinese and Indian civilization, a science of categorizing events and artifacts into inclusive periods has been developed. This classification of cultural development in the field of archaeology is primarily defined according to technological innovation. Thus we often read of a Stone Age—itself divided into two, three or four periods—followed by a Chacolithic or Bronze Age. Generally, human society is then said to have progressed into an Iron Age which is succeeded by a 'Classical' period.

Over the past century, modern archaeology has repeatedly found recourse to this system of chronology, modifying it to fit the particular society under review. A formidable body of archaeological data has been unearthed in the last century from scores of cultures, and the basic framework of this system has proven reliable.

The archaeological record of Tibetan civilization is still so incomplete that it is hardly possible to chronologize its development according to these traditional criteria. At present, such a system of measuring the advancement of Tibetan civilization is merely a guide, mainly useful for cross-cultural comparisons. In this work, evidence of a Stone Age and Metal Age on the Byang thang is reviewed as a backdrop for patterns of cultural development still detectable in contemporary 'brog pa culture. However, without a firm datable and verifiable means of qualifying the evolution of Tibetan civilization from its origins to the age of written records, efforts made in this direction are tentative and incomplete.

At this juncture in Tibetology, events fall into one of two categories: prehistoric and historic. The prehistoric period stretches from the dawn of human habitation in Tibet. To categorize many thousands of years of the Tibetan legacy before the advent of writing as prehistoric does nothing to explicate the dynamics and accomplishments of untold generations. The term prehistory sheds little light on the complexity of cultural development before the first written records. Even if a proto-historic period is devised to account for the existence of a Zhang zhung literary tradition, it is still clear that a method of distinguishing and defining all stages of Tibetan cultural development does not exist. The historical period in Tibet begins in the 7th and 8th centuries with the earliest known records, including the renowned Tun-huang manuscripts.[14]

With the introduction of Buddhism, mainly from India, during the reign of King Srong btsan sgam po,[15] a two-fold system of demarcating Tibetan civilization along Buddhist and pre-Buddhist lines has arisen. This division is perfectly legitimate and useful; however, it has precisely the same weakness as dividing Tibetan civilization into historic and prehistoric periods because recorded history and Buddhism are interrelated cultural phenomena, as are the terms pre-Buddhist and prehistoric. In this work, the terms Buddhist and pre-Buddhist are used specifically to designate religious and mythological categories of tradition while historic and prehistoric are employed more extensively to denote the chronology of any aspect of Tibetan culture.

More desirable, yet far from perfect, is to delineate the development of Tibetan civilization into three chronological categories again borrowed from religious culture: Buddhist, Bon and pre-Bon. However, serious problems are encountered. Although it is well established that Bon, although not necessarily the Bon religion of today, dominated Tibetan religious life until the time of the Chos rgyal kings (Srong btsan sgam po, Khri srong lde btsan, and Khri ral pa can) in the 7th to 9th centuries, its historical origins are shrouded in myth and uncertainty.[16] One school of thought sees Bon arising out of upheavals during the time of the eighth Tibetan king, Gri gum btsan po (Haarh), while another school attributes its rise to a much earlier date (Norbu). It has been suggested

that, according to traditional Bon chronology, the founder of the religion was born in 1917 B.C.E. (Norbu 1995: 156-158).

In this work the term early Bon is used to denote the form of the religion practiced during the time of the Tibetan Yar lung kings and which was gradually suppressed in the 8th and 9th centuries. Early Bon is characterized by a host of apotropaic and fortune-bestowing rites, which are connected to a cosmology where the individual and the universe form a network of psycho-physical energies and divinities. Early Bon was supplanted by assimilated Bon which emerged in the late 10th century. Assimilated Bon is characterized by Buddhist inspired doctrines, metaphysics, ritualism, ethics and institutional organization grafted on or supplanting earlier traditions.

It is impossible to establish when Bon began with any degree of precision. The terms Bon and pre-Bon, therefore, are not at this time chronologically quantifiable. In this work they are applied to elucidate the origins and import of legends, myths and traditions and not to designate time periods per se. As we shall see, there is an intact cultural legacy at the Divine Dyad sites which includes both Bon traditions and pre-Bon traditions.

"Popular religion" is a catch-all phrase for all religious elements that pre-date or fall outside the purview of Bon and Buddhism, but within the sphere of folk traditions. It is largely a concept of exclusion attributed to any cultural phenomenon that is not Bon or Buddhist, and says little about what religion in Tibet was like before the advent of Bon. Chronologically, the term aboriginal is preferable to pre-Bon because it denotes religious and cultural traditions that are autochthonous, indigenous and prehistoric. To an extent, the concept of a popular or folk religion overlaps with that of an aboriginal religion. However, a difficulty stems from the inability in some cases to differentiate aboriginal traditions from folk adaptation of lamaist traditions.

At this time, it has not been determined when aboriginal traditions gave way to Bon traditions nor if there were intervening stages between what can strictly be labelled aboriginal and the rise of the Bon culture and religion. Intermediate periods of development between autochthonous culture and Bon may be indicated. Unfortunately, the character of the exchanges between the early inhabitants of the Tibetan plateau and their neighbors has been lost through the ages, making it difficult, if not impossible, to discern aboriginal traditions from extraneous cultural input. Despite this proviso there is a need to differentiate Bon and Buddhist traditions from those which preceded them. With this in mind, the term aboriginal religion (gdod ma'i chos lugs) is sometimes used in this work to specify the earliest layer of identifiable religion in Tibet and, by extension, to refer to other aspects of early culture.

In this study numerous aboriginal traditions are examined but little attempt is made to delineate them chronologically or determine their origins (save for references to their pre-lamaist character and etiology). A continuity of tradition is one of the hallmarks of the sacred geography of Tibet and of indigenous deities. Yet, barring speculation and inferences drawn from this continuity of tradition, little can be affirmed about the prehistoric development of religion, mythology or other elements of culture at the Dyad

sites or for that matter anywhere else in Tibet. At present the most refined tool for revealing the character of prehistoric cultural development is the use of cross-cultural comparisons. This approach, while serving as a template for ordering patterns of growth and change in Tibet, cannot unlock the specifics of indigenous cultural development. Thus the origins and evolution of primitive culture in Tibet remain little understood.

The Divine Dyads in the Environmental Context

Over time the Divine Dyads have remained a powerful validation of the Tibetan people's commitment to a healthy and sound environment. For all their political, social, cultural and economic implications, the Dyads are nonetheless a symbol of Tibetans willingness to work harmoniously with the natural world.[17] The Dyads are a paragon of the desirability and sanctity of an inviolable physical environment. This environmental ethic, combined with a deep abiding belief in the divine character of the Dyads, typify the mytho-religious complex.

In relation to the Dyads, Tibetans subscribed to a complex set of values, beliefs, proscriptions, philosophies and perceptions which reinforced their aspirations for a pristine and balanced environment. To be sure, there were lapses and shortcomings in the environmental culture,[18] and global environmental shifts and trends were inescapable. Nevertheless, an environmental awareness prevailed in Tibet. Tibetans learned to strike a working balance between economic activities and the environment, and this was especially true on the Byang thang where, in the preceding centuries, material development was minimal.

End Notes:

1. For written references to the gNas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum, see Lha bu g.yang 'brug and bLo bzang bstan pa, p. 4; *Bod ljongs nag chu sa khul gyi lo rgyus rig gnas* vol. 7 (henceforth abbreviated as Nag chu sa khul), p. 583. The only information given in these two references is the names of the three Dyads, the fact that they are holy and that Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo are the only pair to retain their original Zhang zhung names. Bon scholars such as sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag and Nyi zla tshe dbang are aware of the gNas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum. These scholars see Zhang zhung roots in this tradition.
2. The gNas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum should not be confused with a more popular Bon sacred geographical tradition, the gNas chen ri mtsho gsum, which consists of Gangs rin po che, Ma pham g.yu mtsho, and sPos ri ngad ldan, two mountains and a lake in western Tibet. In an unrelated tradition recorded in the *Padma bka' thang*, the three mountains of the three principal Dyads are part of the Gangs gnyis bcu, or 20 major mountains of Tibet (Das: 212).
3. The famous holy mountain known as Mount Kailas has several names in Tibetan, the most popular of these being Gangs rin po che (Precious Mountain). Gangs rin po che is also referred to as Ri rab rgyal po, the mountain at the center of the world, by both Bon po and Buddhists. The mountain is also commonly known as Gangs ti se or just Ti se, an ambiguous spelling which, according to some contemporary Bon po, should be rendered Gangs ti rtse (the Summit of Water Mountain), an allusion to the fact that four of South Asia's most important rivers begin in its vicinity. The Zhang zhung word ti means water and is still in usage in dialects of Kinnaur (Khu nu). However, according to bLa khri mkhan po ti can also mean north and sea side in the Zhang zhung language. Recent research conducted at the Bon po Monastic Center in Himachal Pradesh (India) under the auspices of rGyal ba sMan ri mkhan po found philological evidence for another rendering: Te sed. This evidence comes from the comparative study of the Zhang zhung group of languages. Te is the Zhang zhung word for snow and sed means colossal form; therefore, Te sed translates as Snow Giant or Snow Colossus. In the *Gangs ti se'i dkar chag*, authored by Bon po dKar ru grub chen bsTan 'dzin rin chen rgyal mtshan bde chen snying po (b. 1801), the mountain is also called Shel rgyung rTa rgo, Ge khod gNyan lung and Gangs gnyan ti se (Norbu and Pratts: xxi,109). The female counterpart of the mountain is called variously mTsho Ma pham and Ma pham g.yu mtsho by Buddhists and mTsho ma pang and Ma pang g.yu mtsho by Bon po. In the *bsGrags pa rin chen gling grags* it states that Gangs ti se and mTsho ma pang are like a man and his consort joined and this is why the lake is called Ma pang (Dagkar: Ms-C).
4. For a treatment of the sacred geography of Gangs rin po che and mTsho ma pham, see Norbu and Prats; Victor Chang; Swami Pranavananda; Vitali 1996.
5. The Tibetan Autonomous Region is the name of the province created by the Communists which includes the western, central and some of the northern parts of the Tibetan plateau.
6. In the 1990s a new branch of archaeology, cognitive archaeology, has come of age which endeavors to understand the thought patterns, memory, and the means of knowing of ancient

man. Such a branch of knowledge might ultimately make contributions to comprehending the cultural history of the Divine Dyads and prove a useful adjunct to literary and ethnographic perspectives. Its application, however, is seriously handicapped by a paucity of archaeological data at the Dyad sites. For a more complete picture of cognitive archaeology and the challenges facing it, see *The Ancient Mind Elements of Cognitive Archaeology*, a collection of scholarly papers. Of some interest to this study are papers by Renfrew, pp. 1-12, 47-54; and Zubrow pp. 187-190.

7. Over the last decade, a wide range of Tibetans both in and outside of Tibet were interviewed, in addition to casual conversations with many others. As far as possible, data collected was cross-referenced and verified from two or more sources. Some questions such as: 'who are the parents of the Divine Dyads?' and 'what kinds of beings reside there?' were asked repeatedly. Local historians and religious figures were the single best source of information, but certainly not the only one. Herders ('brog pa), farmers (zhing pa), traders (tshong pa), and government officials also provided much valuable information. Simultaneous translation of interviews was carried out by the author unless there were linguistic difficulties in which case a dictaphone was used so that the conversation in question could be reviewed at a later date. In order to protect the identity and security of the interviewees, the names of individuals have often been withheld. Much of the lore pertaining to myths, legends, customs, religious practices and prehistory at the Dyad sites, is unrecorded and exists by oral transmission alone. The exact nature of this intergenerational transmission warrants study, but in general terms it can be said that much of the orally recorded aspects of culture are passed down to the succeeding generation by parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and religious authorities. Only through verification, based on the compilation of as many sources as possible, could the veracity and relevance of information derived orally be ascertained. As a rule, lore connected with pre-Buddhist culture is on the verge of extinction and in a few cases only one or two people encountered had knowledge of a certain belief or practice. The myths, lore and legends preserved in oral narratives is not a unitary entity but are composed of various cultural and social strands. Oral transmissions of even an identical cultural tradition or historical account can vary substantially according to the person interviewed and his or her political and sectarian affiliations, affective disposition, and educational background. The contents and structures of early myths and legends tends to be especially fluid and open to amendment and personal interpretation.
8. For information on the general nature of Tibetan sacred geography see Ramble; Huber 1994.
9. A good overview map of the Divine Dyads which shows them in relation to southern Tibet and the Himalaya is the 1: 1,500,000 *Himalaya* published by Nelles Verlag, Munich. For a much more detailed topographical treatment of the Dyad sites, see the 1: 500,000 *Tactical Pilotage Charts* (TPC H-9B and TPC H-10A) published by the Defense Mapping Agency, Aerospace Center, St. Louis, Missouri. The modern political geography of the Dyads and of much of Tibet is covered in the *Sa bkra'i mtshan rtags* published by the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) government in both Tibetan and Chinese language editions. The TAR also

publishes more detailed prefectural and county maps but, as a rule, these can be difficult to obtain. Highly detailed topographical maps of the region are published by the People's Republic of China, but are only available with government authorization. To trace the routes of the explorers Krishen Singh and Nain Singh, two of the so-called Pandits, see *Indian Explorers of the 19th Century*, published by the Survey of India, Department of Science and Technology.

10. Vegetation types on the Byang thang include: 1) upper montane steppe, 2) sub high cold steppe, 3) high cold steppe, 4) middle montane desert and steppe, 5) intra-zonal bog, 6) high cold meadow, and 7) hot spring aquatic. For a survey of environmental and vegetational factors on the Byang thang, see David Chang.
11. Probably the first person to refer to the lakes of the Byang thang as the Great Lakes was George Roerich. See Roerich 1967.
12. References to gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho are found in the voluminous literature of Sven Hedin. Nearly all of the references are preoccupied with: 1) the explorer's unwavering attempt to place the Dyads in a more accurate geographical framework; 2) an exposition of the history of exploration in the region; and 3) the logistics and experiences of his expeditions. Much of Hedin's geographical data has clearly been superseded by more modern research, but one should not lose sight of the fact that his work was progressive in the early decades of the 20th century. For gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho, see *Southern Tibet* vol. 3, pp. 81-83,101-104,109-111,125,135,139,141,146-150,152-157,169,177,178,183,185,188, 195,200-203,206-209,214,215,218,219,222,224,226,227,240,241,248,261-263,265, 283,343,344; *Southern Tibet* vol. 4, pp. 81,110,286,297,338; Southern Tibet vol. 5, pp. 9,63,185; *Southern Tibet* vol. 7, pp. 113,147,148,150,171,173,218,219,227,259,322, 323,352,364,370,373,380,494,497,499,503,535-537,541-544,556,560,564,570,572,579, 591.
13. For references to rTa rgo and Dang ra in the works of Hedin see *Southern Tibet* vol.3, pp. 3,32,41,43,45,52,94,148,149,152,219,222,250,251,253,265,266,269,280, 283,286,288,289,313,314,344,345,350,367; *Southern Tibet* vol.4, pp. 107,128,134,135, 142,145,147,149,150,153,159,160,165,166,173,174,176,177,286,297,335; *Southern Tibet* vol. 7, pp. 361,371,372,494,497,503,536,539,541,542,547,561,563,568,571,573,591,592; *A Conquest of Tibet*, p. 226; *Trans-Himalaya* vol.I pp. 208,249-251; Trans-Himalaya vol.II, pp. 20-34.
14. Tun-huang, an important trade and cultural center, was founded no later than the 5th century. The Tibetans occupied it for approximately one century between the mid-700s and the mid-800s. In the 1030s, probably as a result of a Tangut invasion, manuscripts written in Tibetan, Chinese, Sogdian Khotanese and Uighur were removed from neighboring monasteries and concealed in a cave complex. In 1907, Stein and, in 1908, Pelliot discovered the hidden manuscripts. Only a small portion of the total material is in Tibetan and most of this consists of Buddhist texts. Non-Buddhist material in Tibetan includes annals (royal court histories), chronicles (origins of the country), ritual texts, collection of proverbs, hunting laws and prognosticatory texts. For a summary of the background of the Tun-huang manuscripts see Crescensi and Torricelli.

15. For a history of the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet, see Snellgrove and Richardson; Snellgrove 1987.
16. Bon po scholars often divide their religion into three periods of diffusion: First Diffusion—the early period between the reigns of King Mu khri btsan po and Gri gum btsan po; Second Diffusion—from the Bon restoration under King sPu de gung rgyal to the time of prosecution under King Khri srong lde btsan; Third Diffusion—from the time hidden texts were revealed beginning in the 10th century. Compare Dagkar: Ms-A.
17. Works that look at the environmental ethic in Tibet include: Huber 1991, Vigoda, Rather, Dalai Lama XIVth 1995.
18. The resources of the Dyads have always been actively used by the native people which at times led to environmental crises. The belief in the holiness and purity of the Dyads alone could not offset deleterious environmental impacts associated with the exploitation of natural resources. Resource extraction, although conflicting with the cultural ideals, was and is very much a reality. As we shall see, deforestation became a problem at the Dyad sites long before the Communist period and wild yaks ('brong) were wiped out by hunters generations before. Almost a century ago, Hedin noted that wild yaks were not found in the rTa rgo region (*Trans-Himalaya* vol. II: 22). Henry Hayden, in 1922, found deserted alluvial gold workings at 'Om bu, Dang ra g.yu mtsho (Hayden: 145). In the gNam mtsho region, a variety of geological resources are actively sought out by the 'brog pa, as was reported to Bya do rin po che during his visit to the lake in 1987. Near La rgan la gold is reportedly found. On the south side of gNam mtsho, at Dwags po bya dkar, crystal is found, at Bya do red slate, and at sBra sbyar sno srib rlung chen blue slate. Near Go ra ri on the west side of the lake, rDo rgyun, a soft translucent white or green colored stone is carved to make the beads of rosaries, statues and vessels. A natural resource of gNam mtsho actively traded elsewhere in Tibet are gser sha and dmar sha, two kinds of highly prized edible mushrooms. For a survey of the environment in Tibet see *Tibet: Environment and Development Issues; Essential Environmental Materials on Tibet.*



gNyan chen thang lha

CHAPTER ONE

gNyan chen thang lha in History, Religion, and Mythology

Introduction

This chapter examines the complex array of religious, mythological and historical elements which make up the multifaceted personality of gNyan chen thang lha. The sacred mountain is composed layer upon layer of belief, devotional practice, ritual construction, and myth assembled during untold millennia of Tibetan cultural development. The myths and religious practices surrounding gNyan chen thang lha are investigated using anthropological and archaeological models to analyze the historical and cultural significance of oral and textual sources.

In the amalgam of beliefs, myths, rituals, ethics and doctrines that make up the Tibetan religion, three broad categories of tradition can de discerned: that of Buddhism (Ban de'i chos lugs), Bon (Bon po'i chos lugs) and the autochthonous religion (gdod ma'i chos lugs). It is important to note that while these three religious traditions originated and developed independently, they have over the course of time come to share a common ground. This system of classifying religious development in Tibet should be seen as no more than a guide to ordering temporal and cultural phenomena and influences relating to gNyan chen thang lha.

Although prehistoric and proto-historic cultural development in Tibet (pre-7th century) is poorly understood, at least three major religious traditions can be discerned in the study of the Divine Dyads; Bon and Buddhism, based on a complex institutionalized system with a clerical hierarchy, and the autochthonous religion, an aboriginal, amorphous system based on the placation, interaction and empowerment of indigenous deities. Due to the degree of syncretism that characterizes Tibetan religion, especially in the arena of sacred landforms, this classification scheme is not a systematic bedrock on which all cultural developments can be expected to rest.

gNyan chen thang lha is one of Tibet's best known mountain divinities. In Sikhim ('Bras ljongs) and eastern Nepal, he is worshipped as one of the key mountain protectors. In a common grouping of four mountain gods known to people throughout Central Tibet, gNyan chen thang lha is the principal territorial god (yul lha) of the north. The other mountain gods of this group are: gNod sbyin gangs bzang (west); sKu lha gangs ri (south); and Yar lha sham po (east). The origin of this tradition may date to the pre-Imperial period of the Yar lung dynasty, when these four mountains could have been

employed by the Yar lung kings as geographical and supernatural markers of the boundaries of their kingdom. Yar lha sham po, for example, is renowned as the place to which the first Yar lung king, gNya' khri btsan po descended from heaven on a beam of light in the royal foundation myths.[1]

gNyan chen thang lha also played an important role in Yar lung dynastic history, as revealed in the *Old Tibet Chronicle*. In verse 64 of this document it states: "Increased the narrow land (of his lord)...Pang-sum, a 'dron-po cut off the summit of Thang lha and added it to Sham po for plowing" (Beckwith 1984: 213). This passage indicates that the borders of the Yar lung state extended at least as far as the northwestern limits of central Tibet, as Beckwith aptly points out in his commentary to the *Old Tibet Chronicle* (Beckwith 1984: 237,238). It also suggests that gNyan chen thang lha functioned as a kind of territorial beacon delimiting the borders of the kingdom. Similarly, sKu lha gangs ri probably circumscribed the Yar lung territory to the south, while gNod sbyin gangs bzang marked the western frontier during at least some of the pre-Imperial period.[2]

In an offering text written by the Fifth Dalai Lama entitled *Lha mchog rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi 'phrin las brgya phrag nyid ngos 'dzin pa'i snang gsal*,[3] gNyan chen thang lha has a wider scope, and is called the yul lha of the 'Four Divisions of Central Tibet' (dBus gtsang ru bzhi),[4] and is recorded as having different names in different parts of this territory (*Ka-23*, fol. 20r,20v). The text states that in Kyid shod klung he is known as gNyan chen mkhar nag (the Great gNyan of the Black Castle); in Pho mo rdzing ring, he is known as kLu bdud mgo dgu (the kLu bDud with the Nine Heads); in Lho stod dbu ru, as sKu lha mkhar ri (the Embodied Lha of Castle Mountain); in sGo chu lha rgyab, as bDud po zla ba'i gdong can (the bDud with the Moon Face); in Mon kha ring mo, as bDud po bkrag med (the Male bDud with the Dull Complexion); in Seng ge rdzong, as Zu ra zur skyes (in the Zhang zhung language zur means rock/cliff or brag in Tibetan); and in Lho brag mkhar chu, as dGe bsnyen snyon kha.

In this tradition, gNyan chen thang lha is the pre-eminent yul lha of central Tibet, whose emanations take on different names and appearances in accordance with their location, effectively expanding the geographical scope of the mountain. It is this process of emanation that permits gNyan chen thang lha to transcend the physical bounds of his immediate environment and assume control of more distant quarters of central Tibet. This tradition also illustrates that gNyan chen thang lha became paramount over the other yul lha of central Tibet. This might have first transpired as a consequence of a rivalry between the sPu rgyal and Zhang zhung kingdoms, with gNyan chen thang lha serving as a kind of victory symbol or prize to be won between the competing kingdoms.[5]

gNyan chen thang lha is part of another well known Buddhist and Bon grouping called Ti thang spom gsum.[6] These confer a pan-Tibetan stature on him which includes Mount Ti se (Gangs rin po che), gNyan chen thang lha and A myes rMa chen spom rma.[7] These three great hallowed mountains span the entire breadth of Tibetan cultural territory, with gNyan chen thang lha occupying a position virtually equidistant between the other two members. Ti se rules over western Tibet, A myes rma chen spom ra over

A mdo, and gNyan chen thang lha over mDo khams, a vast area covering central and parts of eastern Tibet. This grouping of mountains therefore acknowledges gNyan chen thang lha's proclamation to Gu ru rin po che that he has sovereignty over the four divisions of central Tibet. It also demonstrates that he is one of Tibet's foremost mountain gods, standing in fame and reputation above a myriad of lesser mountains.

According to Bon tradition, Ti thang spom gsum originated in the Zhang zhung kingdom, which may have spanned most of the Tibetan plateau. Even if Zhang zhung was as large as it is purported to be in semi-historical accounts, the question arises as to why was rTa rgo rin po che, a soul mountain (bla ri) of Zhang zhung, not included in the grouping? It seems more likely that the origins of the Ti thang spom gsum lie in the unification of the Tibetan plateau under King Srong btsan sgam po. This triad of mountains may have been testament to the imperial power of the Yar lung dynasty, acting as a geographical and religious marker of its glory and attainments which spanned the entire plateau. Drawing from the aboriginal cult of the yul lha as Tibet expanded its frontiers, it strove to incorporate more and more sacred landmarks under its authority and stewardship. This would have admirably served to help legitimize and validate its conquests and control over new territories. The political importance of hallowed mountains like gNyan chen thang lha cannot be overestimated.[8]

gNyan chen thang lha- the Protector of the Doctrine

gNyan chen thang lha has evolved as one of Tibetan Buddhism's most important protectors (chos skyong). The founders and great scholars of all four sects of Buddhism recognized the divinity of the mountain to be a powerful guardian of the religion. In fact, among the rNying ma pa, gNyan chen thang lha is thought to be the most estimable worldly protector ('jig rten pa'i srung ma). gNyan chen thang lha's function as a guardian of Buddhism and Buddhist practitioners can primarily be traced back to the agency of Gu ru rin po che, the tantric adept and missionary from Uddiyana. According to tradition, it was during the reign of King Khri srong lde btsan (755-797) that Gu ru rin po che (sLob dpon padma 'byung gnas) came to Tibet and subdued countless autochthonous deities which were inimical towards Buddhism, gNyan chen thang lha and his consort gNam mtsho phyug mo



Gu ru rin po che

among them. In the *Lha mchog 'bar ba rtsal gyi srog gtad kyi rjes gnang mu thi la'i phreng ba*, written by the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682),[9] a vivid description of the subjugation and conversion of gNyan chen thang lha is given (fol. 2r,2v,3r):[10]

Gu ru rin po che came to the Byang thang and found himself under the scrutiny of gNyan chen thang lha. He discovered that gNyan chen thang lha had transformed himself into a huge white snake with his head in Gru gu'i yul, and his tail at Sog chu yer thang brkyad in Khams, a great distance away. Through his magic the mountain spirit had stretched himself in this way in order to show off his formidable power. The very middle of the snake, which was named kLu rgyal ni le thod dkar, lay across Gu ru rin po che's path. Undaunted, Gu ru rin po che placed his staff (phyag 'khar) on the snake's back and ordered him to go and quickly bring him a sacrificial offerings (tshogs). The snake raced away towards his mountain and, at that moment, the ice covering gNyan chen thang lha began to melt away. As a consequence, the rock underneath the mountain became visible and it started to crumble and disintegrate. Terrified, gNyan chen thang lha immediately made a tshogs and offered it to Gu ru rin po che. Instantaneously the snake turned into a young boy wearing white clothes and a turquoise head ornament (g.yu yi zur phud). Clearly defeated, gNyan chen thang lha prostrated to Gu ru rin po che, circumambulated him, and offered the life force of his heart (srog snying). Gu ru rin po che administered an oath to gNyan chen thang lha, making him a Dharma protector, and bestowed upon him a secret name, Most Skilful and Excellent Thunderbolt (rDo rje mchog rab rtsal).[11]

His work completed, Gu ru rin po che left for bSam yas, taking the middle road. gNyan chen thang lha transformed himself into a gigantic yak and went to meet the Vajrayana master. En route he encountered King Khri srong lde btsan, who had come to receive Gu ru rin po che. gNyan chen thang lha immediately turned into a man with a white complexion and five ornamented hair buns (zur phud lnga) and offered his respects to the king. Gu ru rin po che appeared, and asked gNyan chen thang lha why he had assumed a human shape and paid homage to the king when even all the srin and lha are afraid of the mountain. gNyan chen thang lha replied that he and the king were connected in four different ways, and this is why he showed respect. gNyan chen thang lha went on to enumerate the four ways in which he and the king were connected: he noted that he is the protector of the four divisions of central Tibet (dBus gtsang ru bzhi) and so is the king; secondly, both are very faithful beings; thirdly, both are judiciously modest; and fourthly, both are meritorious. gNyan chen thang lha reiterated to Gu ru rin po che that he was fond of these qualities and this was why he held the king so dear. Gu ru rin po che then asked gNyan chen thang lha why he became a yak in the morning. The mountain divinity explained that he took the form of a fierce yak in order to destroy oath breakers. Gu ru rin po che observed that gNyan chen thang lha had a good relationship with King Khri srong lde btsan and instructed him to protect the king's lineage. Gu ru rin po che then turned to the king and told him to offer prayers to gNyan chen thang lha. Related to this legend is a tradition that gNyan chen thang lha is a sku

lha/sku bla (a protective personal deity) of King Khri srong lde btsan (cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 207); this underpins the close ties that existed between gNyan chen thang lha and King Khri srong lde btsan.[12]

There are a number of other legends surrounding the conversion of gNyan chen thang lha. Some Tibetans assert that gNyan chen thang lha first took an oath to protect Buddhism with Phyag na rdo rje; a second time with Padma Heruka on Has po ri; a third time with the bSam yas yi dam, rDo rje gzhon nu; and a fourth with Gu ru rin po che (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 207, Snellgrove 1957: 239-243). In the legends of the inhabitants of the gNyan chen thang lha region, it is said that the mountain tried to deter Gu ru rin po che's progress by sending fierce snow and hail storms against him. In one written account, Gu ru rin po che was able to overcome this attack and have gNyan chen thang lha submit to him by meditating on the bodhisattva Vajrapani (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 205). Another account of the taming of the holy mountain is found in kLong chen rab 'byams ma's *Yang tig chen mo'i lo rgyus* (Ladrang Kalsang: 93).

There is also a tale in the *gNyan chen thang lha'i bskong so*, a text of offering rituals,[13] which states that in addition to Gu ru rin po che, the holy mountain is bound to an oath by rJe tsong kha pa as well as by A ti sha, 'Brom ston and their disciples. This text alleges that when rJe tsong kha pa gave teachings at dGa 'ldan monastery, gNyan chen thang lha came to listen and took another oath to protect the Dharma. Moreover, the *gNyan chen thang lha'i bskong so* affirms that the mountain is a patron of the arhats and a special protector of the Jo khang Jo bo image and of the city of Lhasa. gNyan chen thang lha is also considered the protective mountain deity of dMar po ri and there is a seldom opened chapel in his honor in the Potala palace (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 205). A popular tradition ascribed the role of protector of the Tibetan government of the pre-Communist period to gNyan chen thang lha, a tradition whose origins lie with the Yar lung dynasty.

The text *Ka-23* written by the Fifth Dalai Lama records that gNyan chen thang lha was brought under an oath by the great masters Gu ru rin po che, Vimalamitra, Vairocana, King Khri srong lde btsan and his son, and by Jo mo mkhar chen bza' (the secret name of Ye shes mtsho rgyal) solemnizing the Buddhist relationship with the mountain (fol. 9r,9v). gNyan chen thang lha was compelled to protect people of virtuous inclination and action, to act as the yul lha of dBus gtsang ru bzhi and to act as the personal protective deity of the Tibetan kings (mnga' bdag rgyal po'i sku lha). The lineage of those who bound gNyan chen thang lha with an oath continues with the gTer ston rigs 'dzin yab sras (yab Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phrul, sras 'Gro pa'i mgon po).[14] The oath givers then divide into three branches.[15]

The biography of 'Bri gung pa chen pa records that when the lama visited the Byang thang, he was given a fine welcome by gNyan chen thang lha at a place called Byang gnam ra'i glang mor (sTag lung rtse sprul: 14). sTag lung pa tradition includes a biographical tale, which recounts how gNyan chen thang lha helped the lama sTag lung pa bKra shis dpal during his one month stay in the proximity of the mountain deity (sTag lung rtse sprul: 14). gNyan chen thang lha offered him many things including the

milk of snow lions, a pillar of crystal and a golden awning (gser gyi rgya phib). In return, gNyan chen thang lha received the blessings of the lama and reaffirmed his vows to uphold the Dharma. He agreed to protect all schools of Buddhism, especially the sTag lung pa. The Sa skya pa sect also have a gsol kha text entitled *Thang lha'i gtor bsngo*[16] which establishes that gNyan chen thang lha is their protector, although it provides no information on the relationship between its lamas and the mountain.

There are other legends orally preserved in the shadow of the mountain which explain how gNyan chen thang lha became a Dharma protector. The most important one centers around a place called sNying ri (Heart Mountain), located 30 kilometers southwest of 'Dam gzhung in the sNying grong (sNying drung) township. According to the region's pastoralists ('brog pa), sNying ri is where the heart (snying) of gNyan chen thang lha is located. In order to subdue the mountain, Gu ru rin po che visited this vital zone of the deity, an event which local sources say was a key to the deity's subjugation. In Tibetan popular belief the heart is the seat of the life force (srog), mind (sems) and soul (bla). Gu ru rin po che is said to have struck his staff on the ground right in the very center of sNying ri, which led to the instantaneous defeat of gNyan chen thang lha. As a result, the mountain was bound by an oath to protect Buddhism and was made special protector of the 'Dam brgya shog brgyad, the eight pastoral camps of the region.

Oral tradition also speaks of a cave located high above sNying ri called Shel mkhar phug (the Cave of the Crystal Fort) or Lha shel phug (the Divine Crystal Cave). This cave is considered the soul (bla) cave of gNyan chen thang lha and, as is to be expected, Gu ru rin po che is believed to have visited it. The water draining from around this cave forms the sNying chu, which flows past sNying ri and sNying grong. There is another holy cave in the vicinity, called bKra shis gu ru sgrub gnas, which is connected to Gu ru rin po che's victory over gNyan chen thang lha. This cave is where the tantric master is believed to have meditated. Adjacent to sNying ri is another spur on the south side of gNyan chen thang lha named Rin chen phung pa, which is said to be the shoulder of the anthropomorphically envisioned gNyan chen thang lha. This scrub juniper (spa ma) studded hillside is thought by local people to be the most auspicious place to make incense offerings to the sacred mountain.

sNying drung features in another legend concerning Gu ru rin po che and gNyan chen thang lha, preserved in the *rBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* (Stein edition)(pp. 39,40): Gu ru rin po che once provoked gNyan chen thang lha by threatening to perform dmar thab (contamination of the hearth) for the great demi-god (gnod sbyin) and kicked over a pot. This enraged gNyan chen thang lha, and the mountain became destructive. Black clouds gathered and thunder, lightening and hail erupted. Thereafter, Gu ru rin po che went to the top of a hill called Gal ta at sNying drung and encountered a menacing white klu. Gu ru rin po che announced that the white klu should be placed under an oath but it fled to a faraway ocean. The tantric master reiterated that it needed to be caught and bound to an oath. By constructing five mandalas and meditating for three

days he pacified the anger of the klu and bound it to an oath. Consequently, gNyan chen thang lha submitted to him.

In the older *sBa bzhed gtsang ma* ,[17] a variation of the above account is found: Gu ru rin po che went from Gal te to gSho chu, where he encountered gNyan chen thang lha as a young white klu. He announced that the klu must be subdued and noted that under it was a small hell. Gu ru rin po che meditated on compassion before travelling to sNying drung. The klu, also called Tshangs pa, questioned whether the tantric master had the ability to subdue harmful spirits (gnod sbyin). In response, Gu ru rin po che placed the carcass of a donkey in a copper vessel and boiled it. He then kicked the vessel, upturning it, which enraged gNyan chen thang lha. In the mid-winter the mountain became shrouded in a murky pall and from thick black clouds, thunder, lightning and hail appeared. From that time on gNyan chen thang lha became less angry. Gu ru rin po che continued his meditation and conducted a gtor ma ritual which caused the sNying chu to boil for a month. The tantric master again focused his attention on gNyan chen thang lha and once more dark clouds appeared around it spewing thunder, lightning and hail. Then a group of harmful, young klu escaped to the ocean. Gu ru rin po che observed that they should be apprehended and subdued. He continued his meditation for three days and as a result the pall (stug chom) hanging over the countryside was dispelled and it became fair again. The klu gNyan chen thang lha surrendered and became a subject of Gu ru rin po che.

In the Bon religion, as in Buddhism, gNyan chen thang lha is classified as a worldly guardian, that is, one who has not yet passed out of earthly existence. According to tradition, when gShen rab mi bo che, the son of dMu rgyal, came to Bod khams, he encountered the fury and resistance of gNyan chen thang lha and his horde of dmu.[18] This, however, did not prevent gShen rab from making gNyan chen thang lha a protector of his religion. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, Bon po believe that gNyan chen thang lha retains its pre-Buddhist Bon identity as a guardian of their religion. The Bon po believe that Buddhists in fact honor and worship one of their deities. Their main point of contention in relation to gNyan chen thang lha was the ability of Gu ru rin po che to effect a permanent transformation in the personality and propensity of the mountain. The debate inevitably revolves around the historicity of Gu ru rin po che and his thaumaturgic capabilities. Interestingly, both the Bon po and Buddhists agree that gNyan chen thang lha had different proclivities before their contact with him. This indicates that the mountain possessed a distinctive aboriginal character prior to the establishment of the more modern Tibetan religions.

It is clear that gNyan chen thang lha was a formidable deity in his own right and apparently a very necessary ally for the spread of Buddhism in Tibet. His prominence is borne out by the number of conversions he was subjected to and there is clear indication that gNyan chen thang lha was already a protective deity, as the Bon tradition maintains. As we have seen, each sect tries to integrate him into their tradition by carving out a niche for the mountain in their pantheon. gNyan chen thang lha has found a personalized

place in each of the religious institutions of Tibet, which ensures his position as a pan-Tibetan divinity, regarded by all Tibetans with a certain degree of affection and familiarity. The chos skyong gNyan chen thang lha, as a focal point of ritual devotions and of religious history, is a defining element of Tibet's unique brand of Buddhism.

gNyan chen thang lha-the Yul lha

gNyan chen thang lha is a quintessential example of a yul lha/yul sa lha (god of the locale), a deity that protects the country and its inhabitants. The yul lha is key to the apotheosis of the mountain.[19] Yul lha are often conceived of as monarchs, whose power and appearance resemble human monarchs. As a yul lha, the mountain's protective function extends beyond religious concerns to include those of the everyday life of the community. Due to the fame and the size of the country gNyan chen thang lha presides over, he is thought of as a national yul lha, one whose reach covers all of Tibet. Yul lha are found in a variety of natural features but are most often mountains. A synonym used colloquially for yul lha by the 'brog pa is spyi lha, the ordinary or common god.

Most fundamentally, yul lha are considered protectors of the vitality and sanctity of the country they rule over and the people, animals and spirits, both benevolent and harmful, that inhabit it. They are guardians of health, good fortune, fame, prosperity, success, happiness, stability and strength. They have the power to increase these vital qualities for the individuals living within their auspices and conversely, in inauspicious circumstances, they may detract from a person's well-being. For gNyan chen thang lha, this is borne out by a study of his gsol mchod (invocatory) texts and the testimonies of people living in his vicinity. As with other indigenous deities, this fluid relationship of both bestower and detractor mirrors the vicissitudes and uncertainties of the natural world. The crux of beliefs associated with gNyan chen thang lha as a yul lha can be summed up as follows: when his subjects honor their social, religious and environmental obligations, gNyan chen thang lha is a bestower of auspicious qualities, but should he suffer physical defilement or any other indignity, he is sure to strike back on either an individual or collective level.

gNyan chen thang lha's influence operates either unilaterally or multilaterally, constructively or destructively. In the first instance, the stress is on the individual and community, and in the latter instance, on the moral relationship between the mountain and people. gNyan chen thang lha's role is demonstrated by the 'brog pa vision of a stern patriarch ready to help his children whenever necessary but just as ready to punish them for any infraction. Over the course of time, a set of conventions governing the people's conduct with the hallowed mountain developed as a functional response to the vagaries of the natural world. These conventions reflect the ethical basis of the social and environmental values of the 'brog pa and maintain the viability and coherence of the community. Generally, rather than a superstitious burden, the beliefs surrounding

gNyan chen thang lha helped to foster ecological and social harmony. The regulatory ethical role of the mountain admirably serves the needs of Tibetans, providing them with a symbol of justice, albeit a somewhat ambiguous one.

gNyan chen thang lha's role as a mediator in the affairs of people is well illustrated: the region's pastoralists claim that he is instrumental in determining weather conditions. The general belief is that when the mountain is satisfied, good weather will prevail and when he is angry, bad weather results, and that his meteorological dispensations are directly related to the behavior humans. For the 'brog pa, good weather consists of winters and springs with light snowfall and summers with adequate rainfall and no snow. Bad weather includes blizzards and droughts. A little further afield in 'Phan yul, the farmers are dependent on gNyan chen thang lha's good graces to insure a good harvest of grain. It is commonly believed that if the mountain becomes angry, he will send crop-destroying hail.

'Brog pa also believe that gNyan chen thang lha is an important factor in determining an individual's longevity and the status of his or her health. This is because he is thought to be able to either enhance or diminish a person's srog. The srog, or life principle, is the force which sustains the life of all organisms.[20] Such a belief stems from pre-Buddhist times, when the srog was a fundamental concept in explaining human well-being. A state of good health is still defined on the folk level as dependent on an undiminished srog. Inversely, disease is the result of a weakened srog. The concept of the srog has become integral to Tibetan medical theory, where it is connected with the three bioenergetic systems of the body.[21]

The srog is believed to reside in an invisible column called the dbu ma that parallels the spinal column. Every living being is thought to have a srog, including supernatural beings such as gNyan chen thang lha. The 'brog pa believe that the srog of gNyan chen thang lha is located in his srog shing, an unseen vertical axis in the heart of the mountain. This srog shing corresponds to the dbu ma of human beings. The srog of the mountain is thought to be so powerful that it has a salutary effect on the constellation of beings within its ambit. It is inextricably connected with the rlung rta, a protective force which gNyan chen thang lha emits. The 'brog pa, however, also point out that this inherent salubrious effect of gNyan chen thang lha's srog can be reversed by the mountain, as retribution for the transgression of individuals. In such cases, gNyan chen thang lha has the power to damage a sinner's srog.

As custodian of the srog, one of the sacred mountain's most important tasks is that of caretaker of livestock, the foundation of the 'brog pa economy. The health, fecundity and viability of the 'brog pa's sheep, goats, yaks and horses hinges on the srog and is believed to be directly related to the custodial power of gNyan chen thang lha. The rearing of livestock, especially the raising of young animals which are inherently vulnerable to disturbances, is vitally dependent on the beneficence of the mountain. In order to guarantee the cooperation of gNyan chen thang lha the 'brog pa resort to a range of propitiatory and dedicatory rites. As guardian of animals, gNyan chen thang

lha is the archetypal herdsman and is fondly referred to as 'brog pa chen po (the Great Pastoralist) by the 'brog pa. In this capacity the mountain is the keeper of the flocks by virtue of his influence over their srog. 'Brog pa chen po is the mystical shepherd who, like his human counterparts oversees the migrations, breeding, shearing, milking, sheltering and feeding of livestock. He is the ever-present sentinel and sustainer of the herds, and thus is held in very high esteem by the 'brog pa.

As a worldly protector, gNyan chen thang lha holds sway over the mundane affairs of people and their environment. The full spectrum of human activities comes under his purview. He contributes to success or lack of success in work, marriage, travel, planning, child-rearing, construction of homes and a plethora of other personal, economic and social activities. Fundamentally, gNyan chen thang lha functions as an archetypal father figure for the 'brog pa. While the various buddhas and other Buddhist deities have partially superseded gNyan chen thang lha as spiritual patriarch, the tradition lives on in more than an allegorical sense, because gNyan chen thang lha fulfils many fatherly functions as provider, sustainer and protector. In this archetypal role he is sometimes called the rgyal yab (royal father), the native father-god of the herdsmen.

There has been a growing fear in the region recently that gNyan chen thang lha has been angered by economic liberalization and attendant ecological problems. Mining operations, the commercial exploitation of plants and the development of modern settlements are said to be of grave concern to the mountain. As king of the land and its natural resources, gNyan chen thang lha is thought to see such activities as an affront to his well-being and dignity. Some 'brog pa claim that, as a result, gNyan chen thang lha is threatening to bring catastrophe to the country. There is a common fear that, as environmental degradation increases, the risk of disaster also grows.

A story circulating recently in 'Bri ru county relates that gNyan chen thang lha and his servants were planning to take action against those extracting caterpillar fungi and fritillary bulbs from the mountains (Ma 1991: 16,17). The mountain's extreme sensitivity and supernatural strength is thought to be a potentially lethal combination. In another account circulated in dPal mgon county in recent years, it is said gNyan chen thang lha is about to unleash a tide of poison against the mining operations. Increasingly, the 'brog pa feel that economic immigrants flooding into the region to exploit natural resources are courting disaster with the yul lha, and they themselves will not be immune from this.

'Brog pa affirm that, on a physical level, gNyan chen thang lha is made of stone, fire and ice and other manifestations of the five elements,[22] but inside or secretly, he is a living, sentient organism. This is because he is synonymous with the yul lha and a host of other deities, all of which are considered very much alive, each with its own srog and consciousness (rnam shes). These deities are active within the noumenal nature of the mountain, represented by the various souls (bla) the mountain embodies. In other words, the soul of the mountain, the soul of the yul lha and souls of other deities embodied by gNyan chen thang lha are one and the same. The bla is the psychoenergetic function

essential in the sustenance of living beings and is related to the energies of the internal and external worlds (Norbu 1995: 95,246). The bla is inextricably allied with both incarnate and discarnate beings consciousness, and is closely affiliated with sentience or the sentient force entwined with personality or ego. Tibetans believe the loss of the bla is a phenomenon symptomatized by loss of sentience which, if left untreated, leads to death. This belief in a soul force and its potential loss is held even by educated Buddhists, despite there being no doctrinal grounds for a soul. Even well lettered clerics subscribe to this belief, citing it as a cause of certain mental illnesses characterized by catatonic states.

Not only do flesh and blood beings and spirits act as a support or vessel for the bla, but so do trees, rocks, mountains, lakes, precious stones and other objects which are called bla gnas. Famous examples of external seats of souls include lCags po ri, the bla ri of gLang dar ma and Bum pa ri and Ge 'phel ri, the bla ri of the Tibetan people (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 482). The Ge sar epic is replete with examples of the theme of external souls. People and deities often have soul force animals (bla gnas kyi sems can), which serve as protectors and receptacles of their soul force. bLa animals include tigers, lions, birds, bears, yaks, wolves, deer and perhaps dragons. The belief in the bla is an extremely old one, and which may be related to archaic totemic beliefs.

Tibetan culture shares a belief in the bla with shamanistic cultures throughout central and north Asia.[23] For example, the Tibetans have a belief that the soul escapes through a hole in the sky on a thread of five colors, which is found throughout north and east Asia (Stein: 224). The recall of souls at the time of death is a practice Tibetans also share with shamanistic tribes.[24] It is often believed that those with magical powers have a special degree of control over their bla and can transport it at will. Powerful demi-gods like gNyan chen thang lha can do the same; it was this ability to project his bla which permitted the mountain spirit to embody a white yak and a white snake in the legend about Gu ru rin po che's subjugation of the mountain. The theme of the bla, an important mechanism in magical phenomena, interlaces this survèy of the Divine Dyads.

Sacred mountains are often called pillar of the sky (gnam gyi ka ba) and stake of the earth (sa yi phur ba).[25] These metaphors share a common theme, that of a central axis. Metaphors of the stake and pillar which are used to describe the inner nature of gNyan chen thang lha have been assimilated into Vajrayana philosophy. The 'brog pa affirm that the central axis of the mountain is not unlike the axis or central channel (dbu ma/ kun 'dar ma) containing the source of the vital energy in human beings. The channels (rtsa) are an essential part of tantric physiological theory, which propounds that the regulation of the bioenergetic systems of the mind and body depend on the configuration of subtle energies in the channels. Also in Vajrayana, meditational states are defined according to the movement and qualities of subtle psychophysical energies in the channels.

'Brog pa equate these metaphors of the earth stake and sky pillar with the receptacle of gNyan chen thang lha's bla, the srog shing of the mountain, which is indicative of a

syncretism of Vajrayana philosophy with concepts of pre-Buddhist religion. Effectively, the make-up of the human body is considered a microcosm of gNyan chen thang lha, with systems of subtle energy which function in much the same way. Similarly, the poles (ka ra) supporting the 'brog pa's tents (gur) are also a model of the vertical arrangement of the mountain's life energies. They are said to be able to attract and collect the blessings (byin brlabs) of gNyan chen thang lha, by virtue of being the corresponding central axis of the home. The tent poles therefore have an inherent affinity with the mountain's central axis, expressed in their cosmological verticality. This is especially true of the front pole, which is connected with both the yul lha and pho lha.[26] This kind of contemporary belief which establishes parallels between the tent and the yul lha is reflected in a cosmological account of the tent found in the *lJang gling* (Tucci 1949: 719). In this account, the atmosphere is likened to a tent which is pitched upon the universe; the eight ribs of the tent are the wheel of the sky and the pole is Mount Ti se. On the top of the tent is an opening which the summit of the mountain pole passes through to the center (gung) of the higher plane of the atmosphere.

Another significance of the metaphors of stake and pillar is concerned with a colossal column which pierces the three spheres of existence (srid gsum/srid pa gsum), symbolizing gNyan chen thang lha's mastery over the cosmos and the beings which inhabit it. In this way, gNyan chen thang lha functions as an axis mundi, linking the realms of existence into a coherent totality. Though the universe is partitioned into discrete entities, the mountain forms them into an organic whole, by operating as a superstructure of the universe. This is clearly why mountains like gNyan chen thang lha are commonly called world supports (gling rten). The three spheres of the universe (srid gsum) are the celestial realm (gnam), the intermediate realm (bar) and the underworld ('og). These are respectively associated with the peak, the flanks and the base of the mountain, which together serve as a model of the tripartite cosmos.[27]

The three cosmological spheres are characteristically inhabited by three classes of beings; the lha in the gnam, the gnyan in the bar and the klu in the 'og. According a popular Buddhist list of elemental deities (Lha srin sde brgyad), the lha are characteristically white in color (Tucci 1949: 717). Though not members of the official Buddhist list, the gnyan are commonly believed to be yellow in color and the klu blue. This is borne out by other standard lists of eight kinds of deities (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 299). The klu and gnyan also receive mention in the 33 dimensions of non-human beings (g.yen khams sum cu tsa gsum), a Bon classification (Norbu 1995: 252). As the supreme yul lha of the region, gNyan chen thang lha not only rules over people, livestock and other natural features, but is sovereign over supernatural entities and their offshoots. This is typified by the fact that gNyan chen thang lha includes the names of the deities of two of the cosmological dimensions, the lha and gnyan.

To better understand the personality of gNyan chen thang lha it is necessary to become acquainted with the supernatural beings over whom he lords and with whom he shares many characteristics. gNyan chen thang lha is variously a lha, a gnyan, and a

klu. He is composed of the same energies, the difference primarily being a quantitative one—gNyan chen thang lha is simply more powerful, majestic and holy than the beings he rules. Lha is defined as deity or god. Originally, most of the lha were native sky-dwelling deities, but since the introduction of Buddhism they have become assimilated with the Indian devas.

Lha have a reputation of being more benevolent than other classes of spirits. In fact, the name lha is frequently attached to higher Buddhist and Bon deities. They are generally described as resplendent, noble, immaculate, powerful, refined, beautiful and wise. As noted by Tucci, the lha are associated with celestial phenomena, of special importance to the Bon po (Tucci 1949: 720). As an example, Tucci cites the following Bon deities: the goddesses of the clouds (sprin gyi lha mo), the goddesses of the daybreak (nam lha mo) and the god of lightning (thog lha)(Tucci 1949: 720). As divinities, lha play a vital part in Tibet's genealogical and cosmogonic traditions, and are ancestors both of humans and non-humans in a wide range of contexts.

The gnyan are closely related to the klu and sa bdag and generally reside in the space between the earth and sky (cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 288,289). gNyan chen thang lha, for instance, is called the ruler of all the sa bdag of dBus province (cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 221). The gnyan primarily reside in trees and in the forest and, according to the *kLu 'bum*, many also reside in rocks, mountains, fire, clouds, lakes, and even on the sun, moon, stars and planets (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 288,289). The origins of the gnyan may lie in an archaic ibex/argali (skyin/gnyan) cult. According to the *Tang Annals*, the male gnyan was worshipped by the Tibetans (Stein: 218). To this day, in Brushal in northern Pakistan (the Bru sha of Bon literature?), the ibex is an important part of their ancient religious belief.[28] The gnyan are related to the btsan and sa the, in that all three classes of deities are personified chthonic forces. In their most malevolent form, gNyan are believed to cause disease and misfortune (cf. Tucci 1949: 722; Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 288,289,522). Their purported ability to create epidemics and social discord is well known among Tibetans. However, the gnyan possess a dual personality with divine and demonic halves. The opposing aspects of their personalities relate to both the dualism in ancient Tibetan cosmologies and the native view that human beings are born with a fundamentally good or evil nature.

The four gnyan chen (great gnyan) are also said to be the divinities of prayer flags (Karmay 1993: 152-154). gNyan are also important as clan progenitor deities. In the 13th century text entitled *dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags*, Khri tho and his wife gNyan za are the progenitors of the lDong, dBra and 'Gru clans.[29] In the same manuscript, the father of gNyan za, gNyan rgan, is forced to pay compensation to the sons Khri tho for murdering their father. Compensation consisted of a dragon, eagle, yak, tiger, goat and dog, which came to be associated with the lDong, dBra, 'Gru, sGa, dBa' and lDa respectively, the six proto-clans of Tibet (Bod mi'u gdung drug). According to the text *'Dul ba gling grags*, the six royal lineages of Zhang zhung included the gnyan (Dagkar: Ms-C). gNyan chen thang lha belongs to four orders of the great gnyan (gnyan chen sde bzhi) as its western

member, which also includes rMa rgyal spom ra in the east, dByi rgyal dmag dpon in the south, and sKyog chen sdang ra in the north (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 213).

The klu have become assimilated into the Indian naga, a very ancient class of demi-gods, who make up a principal part of the aboriginal pantheon of the western Himalaya. Buddhism in Tibet was unable to eradicate the ancient klu cults and had to be content with making them the object of a complex liturgy (cf. Tucci 1949: 723). In Mongolia, the master-spirits of the water (luus) are most closely linked with the cult of mountains (Tartar: 11-14). The klu are believed to dwell in the underworld and embody water sources like springs, rivers and lakes, and are least active in the winter season. The klu guard the celestial palaces of deities, cause winds and rains and are also the embodiment of water sources such as rivers and lakes. The *kLu 'bum* records that the orders of klu originated from six eggs laid by the cosmic golden tortoise (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 290). The *kLu 'bum* also records that there are three categories of klu: white, black and multicolored (cf.Tucci 1980: 22). These categories of klu correspond to the chromatic scheme of the srid gsum and are supplementary to their characteristic blue color, the color of water.

kLu are found in the retinue of major Tibetan deities such as dPal ldan lha mo, mGon po, Vaishavana and the guardian of bSam yas, Tsi'u dmar po (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 31,49,71,166). kLu also feature in the train of indigenous Tibetan deities like Byang bdud chen po and bDud nag po sog pa med (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 247,253,254). Along with the bdud,[30] the klu are also messengers of the planetary deity Rahu (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 260). The king of the klu is usually thought to be Zur phud lnga pa (Pancasikha), but in the Bon text *Nam sang zhi ba'i zhi khro'i bskang bshags pa,* the king of the klu is said to be rGyal ba byin chags (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 287). Similarly, the klu, like the gnyan, possess a dual nature and often act in an ambivalent manner towards people. It is commonly believed that, when angered, klu can cause skin diseases. The 'brog pa also believe that, when offended or neglected, the klu pose a threat to their livestock, particularly to the young animals. Especially in their female form, klu play an important part in Tibetan cosmogony and, specifically, the cosmogony of lakes.

gNyan chen thang lha stands supreme in the three cosmological realms and among the beings which inhabit them. The mountain's position as a cosmological nexus has probably remained undisputed throughout Tibetan cultural history, although the cosmological conceptions of Tibetans have undergone change and revision through the centuries.[31] gNyan chen thang lha represents a kind of bridge or link between the realms of light and darkness, the base of the mountain being firmly fixed to the sa, the terrestrial dimension and its summit soaring in the gnam, the celestial dimension. The iconographic tradition of pacific white forms and wrathful black forms of gNyan chen thang lha lends credence to the mountain at one time being part of a binary cosmology. Other evidence centers around the vivid belief the 'brog pa have in the whiteness and blackness of gNyan chen thang lha and how this relates to his appearance and propensity towards people and animals. In his black or wrathful aspect, gNyan chen thang lha is a terrific

deity, bent on annihilation and cataclysm. In his white or pacific aspect, gNyan chen thang lha is the grand and dignified patriarch of the 'brog pa, possessing a very agreeable demeanor. These two diametrically opposed aspects of his personality epitomize the fluctuating tendencies of environmental conditions, and the inherent conflicts in the human personality.[32]

The Bon po and Buddhist yul lha, especially in their aspect as sa bdag (owner of the soil) and gzhi bdag (master of the foundation), appear to have their origins in the tradition of the lha srin and lha 'dre (cf. Haarh: 319). The lha srin and lha 'dre are duplexes of elemental forces which appear to belong to the earliest known phase of religion in Tibet. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, lha, 'dre and srin were the names of three types of early Bon. Lha bon, 'dre bon and srin bon were concerned with the propitiation and worship of these beings or forces which had a divine and ambivalent nature. In what is traditionally considered the earliest classification of Bon, the Shes pa bcu gnyis,[33] the Lore of the Origin Myths (sMrang shes gto dgu) is found in the gTo rites. Here the foundation myths and the 'dre and sri are curiously juxtaposed, although there is no overt connection between them.

In the Shes pa bcu gnyis, the 'dre and sri are wicked classes of beings which must be protected against through apotropaic rites (Norbu 1995: 169-172; Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 300-304). This indicates that their transformation from divine to demonic occurred in the very distant past. The 'dre together with the bgegs and gdon are classified into 18 groups, which are collectively called 'byung po (bhut)(Das: 925). In the aboriginal tradition there is, however, a positive place for the sri (etymologically and functionally related to srin) and 'dre, especially when coupled with the lha.

The most ancient status of the 'dre and sri is preserved in traditions such as the 'dre dkar, a benevolent spirit who aids and protects people and who is most famous in its personified form, as the bkra shis 'dre dkar.[34] The bkra shis 'dre dkar is an emissary of good luck cheer, active at Lo gsar, marriages and other special occasions such as operas. He wears a mask, often made of antelope or lamb skin, decorated with the sun and moon, which resembles the hunter's mask of the Tibetan opera. The bkra shis 'dre dkar's job is to compose and sing benefactory verses designed to bring auspiciousness to the people and to the occasion.

In the 12th century Buddhist *'Jig rten mgon po'i gsung bzhi bcu pa*, written by 'Bri gung gling pa shes rab 'byung gnas, it mentions that bsGyur ba'i Bon was founded by the 'dre who were opponents of Buddhism (Vitali 1996: 100-104).[35] The same text also recounts a legend set in the time of the seventh Tibetan king concerning a youth of the gShen clan who for 13 years was led all around the country by the 'dre (Vitali 1996: 100). As a result, when he returned to human society at age 26, he had the ability to identify the lha and 'dre of a locale, determine if they were beneficial or harmful and, moreover, he knew the ritual system to appease them. In the *Nges don 'brug sgra* by Sog bzlog po, a tale set in the early 10th century is told of the subjugation of the indigenous lha 'dre by the founder of the mNga' ris skor gsum dynasty Nyi ma mgon (Vitali 1996: 553-554).

The tale involves a juniper tree on the north side of Ma pham g.yu mtsho which is cut by the king, causing blood and malignant animals to appear signifying that the lha 'dre had been offended.

In Khu nu, as in Tibet, the lha 'dre are an ambivalent class of spirits leaning towards evil. The lha 'dre are both male and female and are said to inhabit various places around villages. In Khu nu, in some villages, they are still appeased by animal sacrifice offered to the yul lha. In gNas gsang village among the low status Cha mang, community there is a 'dre ally. In Khu nu as well as other locations in the Tibetan cultural world, it is said that sorcerers sometimes befriend 'dre.

The srin as an ancient class of deity are examined in detail in the survey of the lakes of the Divine Dyads. The chu srin, a mythological creature assimilated into the Indian makara is an example of a semi-divine srin. Another example are the rgyal sri dkar po, one of the nine primordial classes of srin who originated in the Sri Country of the Nine Continents (sri yul gling dgu) and who are said to reside in temples (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 300-302). The best example of the benevolent aspect of the srin is the consort of the cosmogonic Ye smon rgyal po, Sri bdag tsun mo, who is mentioned in conjunction with the Phywa Bon of the shes pa bcu gnyis tradition (Norbu 1995: 70). In the Bon text, *Cult of the Deities of the kLung rta in Order to Obtain Fortune (Klung rta'i gsol kha dge legs kun stol)*(Norbu 1995: 70), Ye smon rgyal po is the father of positive existence and light from whom humanity is descended. The offspring of Ye smon rgyal po and Sri bdag tsun mo were born as powerful divine princes of the klung rta (fortune).

The lha 'dre and lha srin are related to the bipartite cosmology of the Yang gsang lugs. The lha are the deities of the celestial sphere and the srin and 'dre are associated with the terrestrial sphere, these forming primal couples. These pairs of lha 'dre and lha srin relate to the prototypical universe, defined in dualistic terms of up and down, light and dark, male and female, hot and cold. The 'brog pa indicate that in relation to gNyan chen thang lha, these duplices seem to form a pyramidal configuration, with the lha or ethereal deities residing at the peak of the mountain and the srin and 'dre, chthonic deities, residing at its base. Some say the lha pool around the head of the srog shing of gNyan chen thang lha, and the srin and 'dre gather around the base. Other sources among the 'brog pa claim that these deities are emitted by gNyan chen thang lha. What is agreed upon by the few people who seem to have any knowledge of this obscure angle of the religious tradition of the Divine Dyads, is that gNyan chen thang lha controls the movement and activities of the lha 'dre and lha srin.

Pastoralism[36] on the Byang thang originated no earlier then the Neolithic period.[37] Prior to this, the economy of the region was based on hunting and gathering. There are several archaic hunting customs and beliefs still prevalent in the region, and gNyan chen thang lha continues to mediate over the success of the hunt. He is believed to be able to seriously punish those who transgress the hunting code. Harm is said to come to those, for example, who kill specially protected ungulates, pregnant animals and animals under the jurisdiction of the mountain.[38] Contrary to popular notions of piety among

the Tibetans, hunting seemingly is permitted by gNyan chen thang lha, so long as these proscriptions are adhered to. There is a tendency among certain devout Buddhists to believe that all forms of hunting are punished by yul lha such as gNyan chen thang lha, but this belief has not prevailed. Other ancient customs still in evidence include offering the meat and horns of slain animals to gNyan chen thang lha. The regulatory function of the mountain must have been especially crucial when people depended on hunting as the mainstay of their economy.

Another belief which has every indication of being very ancient pertains to the status of certain lead herd animals. Stud yaks (spo bo) are extremely prized, as they are essential to the prosperity of the 'brog pa. These very large, solitary and often unpredictable creatures are thought to have a unique relationship with gNyan chen thang lha. The mountain is said to confer special blessings on these animals and to directly guide their movements and behavior. This kind of empowerment facilitates the successful lead of the herds they are entrusted with. The outward signs of this relationship are said to be the animal's spirited and even dangerous comportment. sPo bo, which are customarily festooned with prayer flags and tassels, are the object of special devotions directed towards gNyan chen thang lha. A similarly ancient belief has to do with spirit yaks (lha'i g.yag), whose mothers are ordinary animals but whose fathers are thought to be yul lha like gNyan chen thang lha. 'Brog pa believe that a yul lha can mystically impregnate a 'bri, leading to the birth of an animal with unusual qualities. These offspring tend to be larger than ordinary herd animals and display a wild appearance physically and in temperament.

In a rNying ma pa gsol kha text,[39] gNyan chen thang lha is called the chief dgra lha of Tibet. This appellation is interconnected with gNyan chen thang lha the yul lha, who is the local member of the 'go ba'i lha ga,[40] a group of five ancient dgra lha most intimately connected with all human beings. An early written reference to the go ba'i lha lnga is a gter ma text rediscovered by Grwa pa mNgon shes (1012-1090), which lists them as srog lha, pho lha, ma lha, dgra lha and yul lha (Gibson: 256). The 'go ba'i lha lnga, which are born and reside with individuals, are involved with the maintenance of a person's health, fortune, livelihood and lineage. In the *Vaidurya dkar po*, the yul lha is, instead, part of a group of dgra lha known as skyobs pa'i lha lnga. While being less intimately connected with an individual than the 'go ba'i lha lnga, these are still domestic gods involved with an individual's welfare.

For the 'brog pa in the domain of gNyan chen thang lha, the mountain is the yul lha member of the 'go ba'i lha lnga. He figures in marriage songs about the dgra lha sung by the groom and his party at A pa hor wedding ceremonies. In general, the dgra lha (literally: enemy god) protect their petitioners against enemies, serve as guardians of clan lineages, bring wealth and help to elevate one's social status. The 'brog pa believe that gNyan chen thang lha fulfils all of these functions, making him a dgra lha par excellence. The dgra lha is a key component of the yul lha identity and of mountains, adding a martial coloring to their personality. gNyan chen thang lha is also a member of

a group of important dgra lha called Srid pa'i lha dgu (the Nine Deities of Existence) (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 339), which stresses the cosmogonic function of the dgra lha.

In a text attributed to Gu ru rin po che, a description of the leader of the dgra lha is found.[41] He is said to be red and white in color with a purple hat and golden armor. Over his left shoulder hangs a leopard skin and over his right shoulder the face of a tiger. In his right hand, he holds a three-jointed cane stick and in his left he has an iron falcon. From below his left shoulder, a tiger is poised to leap and from below his right shoulder, a lion is ready to pounce. Trailing him are black dogs, a bear and a dred and running in front of him are countless manifestations of the sde brgyad (class of elemental spirits).

In Bon texts, the dgra lha is customarily called sgra bla. The sgra bla (bla of sound) is a protective energy associated with sound, the most important link between an individual and his bla (Norbu 1995: 60-62). With the dgra lha, we see a recurring phenomenological association where the divisions between the mountain, an individual and deities are ambiguous and overlapping, alluding to an ancient holistic relationship between person, place and divinity.

Yul lha and dgra lha are often thought of as kings, heroes and warriors of the past (cf. Stein: 228,229). The epic hero, gLing Ge sar is called 'Pillar of the Sky' and 'Navel of the Earth', two metaphors also used to describe yul lha (Stein: 203). The lofty height of gNyan chen thang lha serves as a symbol of strength, victory, virility and courage for those who live around it and for Tibetans further afield. In pre-modern times, gNyan chen thang lha expressed the warlike qualities of the clans and camps in its proximity. In the feuds that were prone to break out between various agnatic and nonagnatic groups, gNyan chen thang lha served as a war symbol whose purpose was to raise the esprit de corps of the combatants. Perhaps this military role stems from the Imperial conquests of the Yar lung dynasty, a society with a dominant military culture. Among the nomads of gNam mtsho who refer to themselves as A pa hor there is an ancient warrior hero named Bra gu ngom ngan, who is closely associated with gNyan chen thang lha and who will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

gNyan chen thang lha is a mountain spirit with a pan-Tibetan identity and stature. The mountain is a focal point of Tibetan cultural aspirations and a powerful political symbol investing Tibetans with a distinctive notion of their self-hood and uniqueness (cf. Karmay 1994b: 119). In years gone by, during the multitude of battles fought by the Tibetan people both internally and externally, gNyan chen thang lha was a potent national symbol of integrity and renewal. It also acted as a reference point for ethnic and territorial values, which fostered a sense of being a distinct and separate nation. gNyan chen thang lha dovetails with the cultural identity of Tibet and is thus a beacon reflecting its collective history and experience.

While gNyan chen thang lha is a yul lha with a national purview, he serves the immediate custodial needs and exigencies of the local community. gNyan chen thang lha is one of many hundreds of yul lha found throughout Tibet and borderlands. Strictly

speaking, gNyan chen thang lha is the undisputed yul lha of the 'Dam valley, upper 'Phan yul and a swath of the Byang thang including parts of gNam ru and Nag chu, a contiguous area of roughly 12,000 square kilometers. Within this area there are many minor yul lha, whose dominance and prestige are subsidiary to gNyan chen thang lha. These subsidiary yul lha like gNyan chen thang lha, are protectors of the land and people but are active over a much smaller area. A good analogy of relationship between gNyan chen thang lha and other yul lha operating within his territory, is that of a an overlord and his vassal kings.

Outside of gNyan chen thang lha's direct sphere of influence are yul lha who exclusively serve the interests of their specific communities. When examining gNyan chen thang lha in his non-national role as the sovereign of an explicitly defined swathe of territory, he is called a gzhi bdag, literally meaning 'master of the locality'.[42] Generally, this term is synonymous with sa bdag, 'master of the soil'. Sa bdag like gzhi bdag are usually bound to a specific locale (cf. Tucci 1949: 722). The Bon and Buddhist sa bdag and gzhi bdag are apparently identical with the more primitive lha srin and lha 'dre. As a gzhi bdag, gNyan chen thang lha is territorially independent of other gzhi bdag and rules autonomously over his region. The same can be said of most of the adjoining gzhi bdag; each of them is absolute sovereign over a well defined territory. The primacy of gNyan chen thang lha as a national yul lḥa in no way affects the autonomy of the other gzhi bdag. Tibet is overlaid with an infrastructure of these gzhi bdag, representing decentralized spiritual command of the land, and a network of tribal and clan reference points.

The decentralization of the power of the gzhi bdag is well illustrated in a review of the major ones in the vicinity of gNyan chen thang lha: the celebrated gzhi bdag gNam ra, located on the A mdo and Nag chu county lines; Dar cha Lha mo in Nag chu city; rMa ting 'phrul mo of sNya rong; Pad ni ri bkra of sTeng chen and Gro gad of A mdo county.[43] None of these have any overt connections with gNyan chen thang lha as gzhi bdag. They do not share the same parentage nor genealogy and function independently of each other. By being invested with territorial independence, the gzhi bdag possess undisputed spiritual governance over the welfare and destiny of their land or 'foundation'. Traditionally, the 'brog pa of the Byang thang were divided into camps called tsho pa or shog kha,[44] and were known for their fierce independence and even bellicosity towards one another. The gzhi bdag reflect this rugged individualism.

The collective rituals of mountain worship reflected the integral character of the community and helped to demarcate its political, moral and social bonds (cf. Karmay 1994b: 117). To this day, the offering of incense and prayer flags at Lo gsar and during the summer grass cutting festival are acts of communal participation and solidarity. In this way, gNyan chen thang lha reinforces the camp's sense of uniqueness and separateness, helping to delineate and define their home ground. This is even true of gzhi bdag who have a recognized link with gNyan chen thang lha. Ties between them do not prevent them from working self-sufficiently in the interests of their homeland

and members. Examples of this latter category include bSam gtan gangs bzang of Nag chu county, who is reckoned to be either a general or son of gNyan chen thang lha, and g.Yag lha ser po, the most important gzhi bdag of Sog county, who is said to be a servant of gNyan chen thang lha. Another example is the more distant gzhi bdag of rDza stod county, rDza rgyal, which local informants say is the son of gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho.

gNyan chen thang lha, as a national yul lha, effectively aids the process of forging an interdependent Tibetan identity and polity, while, as a local gzhi bdag, he fosters regional and social independence. These are two principles of Tibetan sacred geography, called territorial interdependence and territorial independence, represent two opposing spatial orientations. gNyan chen thang lha is a most conspicuous index and symbolic mediator of this hierarchy of social and political notions of exclusion and inclusion. These principles mirror the push and pull between regionalism and nationalism that are hallmark of Tibetan political history and this concept of territorial interdependence and independence is important to understanding the mosaic of Byang thang sacred geography.[45]

The Iconography of gNyan chen thang lha

In the Fifth Dalai Lama's work *gNyan chen thang lha'i 'phrin las bdud rti'i chu rgyun*, a description of the mountain's ordinary appearance is provided.[46] In this form, gNyan chen thang lha is iconographically a typical yul lha, visually little different from many other mountain spirits. He is described as a young, handsome man with a regal bearing, having a body that is crystal colored like a lofty mountain, with two hands and three eyes. He wears a half-smile, half-grimace, with his incisors slightly exposed. In his raised right hand he grasps a horse whip with a five pronged rdo rje handle. His left hand holds a crystal rosary. He is attired in three very wide-sleeved robes of red, white and azure, and a white turban with a jewel diadem on top of his head. He is mounted on a superior white horse with a jewelled saddle and bridle. Alternatively, his attributes are a white flag in his left hand and an azure colored fan in his right hand (sTag lung rtse sprul: 15).

In the *sPom ra thang lha rdor legs dang pa drag drag rgyal ma'i gsol mchod* (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 206), gNyan chen thang lha is described as being radiant white in color and wearing white silk and cotton clothes. In his right hand, he brandishes a stick and with his left hand, he counts the beads of his crystal rosary. He roams the three worlds on a divine horse with white feet and is seated in meditational repose. In another textual variation, gNyan chen thang lha has turquoise eyebrows, a lapis lazuli and gold girdle, and a whip which has three rings as a handle instead of a rdo rje. His horse has a saddle of conch.[47] According to Bon po iconography, gNyan chen thang lha, who is sometimes called Thang lha yar bzhugs, possesses radiant wisdom like the sun, has a white complexion, wears a golden helmet and armor, brandishes a bow and arrow and rides

a white horse.[48] In paintings, gNyan chen thang lha is often depicted wearing golden earrings, a mirror on his chest and a quiver on his side and is surrounded by clouds.[49]

A different description of gNyan chen thang lha can be found in a gtor ma offering text written by the founder of the sTag lung bKa' brgyud sub-sect, Ngag dbang bkra shis dpal grub (1142-1210), entitled *gNyan chen thang lha'i gtor mchog 'dod dgu'i 'bras ster zhes bya ba zhugs so* (Accomplished Wishing to Give All Rewards on the Superior gTor ma of gNyan chen thang lha)(fol.1r-2r)[50]:

> "His horse is superior, spirited and standing erect, duck white in color. It has a turquoise halter and golden bridle. On the horse is a saddle made of conch shell, decorated with precious beads resting on top of a blanket. On this saddle is a white syllable Om radiating white light. This light subjugates angry beings and is transformed into the deity Lha chen thang lha. He has a white body, two arms and one face. In his right hand is a cane stick (sba lcag) and in his left hand he holds a crystal rosary (shel phreng). He also has a chopper (gri gug) and a spear with a flag attached to it. He wears white clothes and a three layered mantle (ber) on his torso. The skin of the tiger, bear and leopard make up the sheath of the sword he wears on his side. His is the perfect costume of the 'Khor los bsgyur ba'i rgyal po (Universal Monarch)."

The half-smile, half-grimace gNyan chen thang lha displays reflects the pacific and wrathful sides of his disposition as a yul lha and personifies the dualities inherent in the environment. Nevertheless, the generally auspicious and virile appearance of the yul lha is tantamount to the ideal conception of the country he heads. This idealism expresses itself in the glowing adjectives used to describe the gNyan chen thang lha region as a fertile, salutary and prosperous land of many great attributes by the native 'brog pa. This idealized view of the countryside helps to offset the harsh environmental realities of the Byang thang and reflects the pride people have in their homeland. As such, the mountain is the embodiment of all the positive qualities of his environs, a symbol of its most idyllic side.

In various texts, gNyan chen thang lha's abode is called 'Dam shod snar mo (Oblong Lower Marsh), which is described as verdant, even in the wintertime.[51] In the primary sTag lung text compiled by Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin, his residence is called 'Dam shor nor ma'i ljongs (fol. 15v). gNyan chen thang lha's palace is his mountain, which looks like an ordinary snow mountain from the outside but is really a crystal palace, full of glittering jewels (Text *Nga-53*, fol. 4r,4v; sTag lung rtse sprul; 15). Around the base of his palace is a lake of nectar and between it and the palace is mist and tent shaped rainbows. From above, clouds rain down jewels. Flanking the palace are meadows of green grass and blue flowers beyond which are eight hills resembling crystal stupas.

A more detailed description of gNyan chen thang lha's abode is found in the gter ma text *'Dzam gling spyi bsangs* (Incense Purification for the World), where his palace floats on the peak of the Mountain (fol. 1v,2r):

"The foundation of this palace is made of iron and the walls from conch. The corners of the four walls are made of gold and the roof from lapis lazuli. The overhang of the palace roof is composed of turquoise, the beams supporting the roof of lapis lazuli, the pillars from coral and crystal, and the doors from gold. From the red and white cornice around the roof, bows and arrows and banners are suspended. Fog shrouds the palace and below lies a lake of pure water. The palace has four doors, each guarded by a divine animal. Guarding the south entrance is a white horse; at the east entrance is a huge white yak; at the west entrance is a tiger, leopard, bear and dred mo;[52] the north entrance is guarded by flying birds."

In the gtor ma offering text by Ngag dbang bkra shis dpal grub, the initial visualization requires seeing gNyan chen thang lha's residence as a snow mountain (outer vision) and palace made of precious substances (inner vision)(fol.1r):

"This palace is very beautiful and richly decorated. In the realm above it (steng) there are thundering dragons in the clouds. In the realm around it (bar) there is lightning and continuous drizzle, and in the realm below it ('og), is an assembly of 10,000,000 (countless) armed divine klu warriors. All the good things and activities of the world are heaped up around the palace like thick clouds. In the middle of it s a throne built of precious materials piled high with cloths. Above the throne is gNyan chen thang lha's horse (as described above). "

In another passage of the same text, the mountain is described as white in color like a heap of jewels surrounded by drizzle, clouds, mist, lightning and endless thunder (fol. 3v).

These poetic descriptions of gNyan chen thang lha's abode express the awe and respect that Tibetans have for the mountain. The 'brog pa living around him see gNyan chen thang lha as more than merely ice, rock and vegetation, and somehow perceive its mythic appearance. This kind of transcendental vision of the mountain is still prevalent today.

gNyan chen thang lha-the Ancestral Deity

gNyan chen thang lha is one of the most important ancestral deities of Tibet.[53] This genealogical function is derived mainly from his father, the mountain god 'O lde gung rgyal, who inhabits a 6,000-meter mountain in the province of Nyang po, 30 kilometers west of Zhangs ri. In the primary sTag lung text compiled by Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma, it is stated that gNyan chen thang lha is the son of the gnyan and of 'O lde gung rgyal (fol. 15v). This is a universally accepted attribution among all sects of Buddhism.

'O lde gung rgyal is also called Srid pa'i lha rgan (the Ancient God of Existence) and is envisioned wearing a cloak and turban of silk, adorned with bracelets of turquoise, and carrying a lance with a flag attached to it and a cane stick (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 208). He is mounted on a superior horse, and is surrounded by a host of the male ancestral deities (pha mtshun), ma sangs and dgra lha (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 208). From this description of 'O lde gung rgyal's retinue, it is apparent that all three members, like their chief, have a genealogical function.

In the *Lhasa Edicts*, 'O lde gung rgyal is recorded as the ancestor of the Yar lung kings and the six protoclans of Tibet, the Bod mi'u gdon drug (Tucci 1949: 730). 'O lde gung rgyal is apparently the same deity as O lde spu rgyal of the *Lhasa Edicts* and O lde spur rgyal, who is mentioned in the *Lhasa Inscriptions* as the primordial king (Tucci 1949: 733). The *La dwags Chronicles* name sPu rgyal as the first royal ancestor. Evidently, he is also 'O lde gung rgyal and is connected with the female deity, sPu yul mo btsun gung rgyal who, in turn, is probably related to gNam phyi gung rgyal (Tucci 1949: 733).

The ancestral function of 'O lde gung rgyal is described in the *Can lnga* texts, which were translated and described by Samten Karmay.[54] The *Can lnga* were an early official account of the origins of the kings and the activities of their successors and other members of the royal house. They were first written down in the late 9th or early 10th century and were part of the standard history of the bKa' gdams pa sect. Later, they fell into total obscurity, as subsequent sects were concerned only with their own histories and the myth of the Indian origin of the kings became the accepted norm. The *Can lnga* preserves native origin myths (smrang) with a high degree of integrity not found in later Buddhist-influenced works. These myths gave rise to theogonies and cosmogonies which were part of a coherent magico-religious system in the pre-Buddhist period and were crucial to the socio-religious organization of the state. The origin myth were divided into three traditions: proclaimed, secret and extremely secret. In the extremely secret tradition (Yang gsang lugs), the first Tibetan king was descended from the the'u brang.[55]

The secret tradition traces the genesis of the first king, gNya' khri btsan po, to a complex theogonic and cosmogonic sequence. It states that in the beginning there was the god Phywa ye mkhyen chen po who begot the deities Legs pa'i hor drug and Kho ma 'bro rje. Phywa ye mkhyen chen po blew between the unseparated heaven and earth, creating 13 stages in each of them. At the very juncture of heaven and earth, which are like a ga'u, white and black lights shone representing existence and non-existence. From the interaction of these two lights a female turquoise flower and a male golden flower appeared and, from their union, the god Kha dang skyol med was born. This god mated with dByings kyi skyol med producing a lineage of deities which continues until the union of sTag cha yal yol and Tshe za khyad khyud, from which four brothers were produced. One of these is 'O lde gung rgyal who, with nine Thang nga goddesses, produces 101 sons, whose offspring were so numerous that they became the fathers of all the gods in heaven.

After losing a dice match with one of his brothers, 'O lde gung rgyal left heaven and

went to intermediate space. Here he produced a multitude of offspring which became the fathers of all the gods in space. He then descended to the earth and fathered nine mountain gods, each with a different consort. One of these mountain gods, whose mother was Srin za sbyar lcam ma, is gNyan chen thang lha. 'O lde gung rgyal also fathered the following eight mountain gods: 1) Yar lha sham po; 2) Chims lha; 3) dBye lha spyid dkar; 4) rTsang lha pu dar; 5) rTsang lha Bye'u; 6) Gro lha gang bu; 7) Dwags lha sgam po; and 8) Kong lha de g.yag (Karmay 1994a: 418). The theogony of 'O lde gung rgyal continues for generations until gNya' khri btsan po, the first king of Tibet, is born.

In an analogous tradition, 'O lde gung rgyal and his eight sons were called srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu (the nine originating lha of existence); these consisted of 'O lde gung rgyal and the eight mountain deities he fathered: 1)Yar lung gi yar lha sham po; 2) Byang gi nyan chen thang lha; 3) rGad stod kyi jo bo 'gyog chen; 4) Shar gyi rma chen spom ra; 5) Jo bo g.yul rgyal; 6) She'u dkar ri; 7) sKyid shod zhog lha phyug po; and 8) gNod sbyin gang ba bzang po (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 208,209). In the gtor ma offering text of sTag lung bkra shis dpal it states that gNyan chen thang lha is the leader of the srid dgu lha (fol. 10r), which is the same as the srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu.

The common denominators in the above two lists are that all the members are mountain divinities, their father is 'O lde gung rgyal, and they have two members in common: gNyan chen thang lha and Yar lha sham po. gNyan chen thang lha's stature is accentuated by virtue of his inclusion in both traditions. An alternative list of the srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu is incomplete because only seven names of 'O lde gung rgyal's progeny are given (sTag lung rtse sprul: 14). The members furnished include: 1) De'i bu lha ri bu yar lha sham po; 2) gNyan chen thang lha; 3) rMa chen spom ra; 4) sGrogs chen lngang ra; 5) sGam po lha rje; 6) Zhogs lha rgyug po; and 7) Jo bo g.yul rgyal she'u kha rag (sTag lung rtse sprul: 14). As we can see, there are a number of variations between the two lists of srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu. Why exactly they came to be compiled differently is not known, but variations over time in the enumeration and names of deities between various sects is not uncommon.

How the mountain divinities in the *Can lnga* and srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu traditions relate to one another is not completely clear. They do, however, share a major functional similarity, that of creator deities, especially through their father 'O lde gung rgyal, who is also called Srid pa'i lha chen (the Great Lha of Existence)(sTag lung rtse sprul: 14). Srid pa means existence, the cosmos, the universe, and also to be, to grow, or to exist (cf. Haarh: 269), and thus imports creation, being and generation. Srid pa'i lha are the deities of creation belonging to Bon, based on the older matrilineal theogony of the Yang gsang tradition (Haarh: 270). With regards to gNyan chen thang lha, this creative connotation of the term srid pa is reflected in its role as a generalized ancestor deity of the Hor pa and A pa hor 'brog pa. The tradition of this ancestral link with the mountain is not well maintained and is on its way to oblivion. In fact, most of the 'brog pa interviewed were unaware of it or denied it existed, apparently out of shame for non-Buddhist traditions. An exception to this aversion towards an ancient tradition is found in the Bon po enclave

of sPo che, located 20 kilometers north of the northwest corner of gNam mtsho. Here, gNyan chen thang lha is unabashedly linked to the primordial deities of Bon and to the racial history of the people. gNyan chen thang lha is the Bon po clan deity (rus rgyud lha) of at least one clan in the area.

The structural organization of genealogical myths resembles a schematic depiction of a cosmogony (Tucci 1980: 219,220). In the first stage of this cosmogony, there was a potential existence (bon nyid), which was the equivalent of the void (ye nyid stong pa), and from it a process of actualization occurred (grol). Then, there is divine manifestation (sprul), which leads to the formation of the five elements as typified by the cosmic egg, which in turn reveal (brdol) themselves according to their inherent nature. This is followed by the birth ('byung pa) of an emanation body (sprul pa) and then by the miraculous (rdzu 'phrul) birth of the White Yak of Existence (Srid kyi g.yag po dkar po). In the last phase of the cosmogony, the white yak of existence, a Bon dgra lha, descends into Zhang zhung and completes the process of creation. As mentioned above, a white yak figures in the legends of Gu ru rin po che's subjugation of gNyan chen thang lha, of which it is an emanation. The white yak is also found in the retinue of the holy mountain in the sacred geographical myths of the region. Some 'brog pa of the region allege that gNyan chen thang lha, in the form of a divine white yak (lha'i g.yag dkar po), is the protective deity (rus rgyud lha/A pha'i lha) of certain clans.

In the Buddhist tradition, gNyan chen thang lha is one of the mgur lha bcu gsum (the Thirteen King's gods).These include the nine srid pa chags pa'i lha and four other members; Jo bo ngos gsum, Jo bo g.ya' spung, Jo bo khug lha and Jo bo mchim lha (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 224). These are royal mountain divinities, and both kings Khri srong lde btsan and Srong btsan sgam po are said to have offered prayers to them (sTag lung rtse sprul: 15). Chab srid conveyed the fundamental idea of royal authority while rgyal srid was synonymous with the kingdom or state (Haarh: 269) and, therefore, the srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu potentially take on a political dimension in addition to their cosmogonic significance. There is an interesting tale of royal divinities in the *Treasury of Good Sayings* set in the period when both Bon and Buddhism declined and the Vinaya was broken (Karmay 1972: 99,100). As a result, the royal divinities were deeply upset; Yar lha sham po looked away to the west, Thang lha yar zhugs (gNyan chen thang lha) looked away to the north, rMa chen spom ra recoiled to the east, and lDong lha gung grags retreated south. Undefiled gods, disgusted with the decadence of religion, withdrew into heaven and other divinities fled. It should be noted that three of the four royal divinities in this story are members of the srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu.

The Bon tradition of the mgur lha bcu gsum is found in the *Lha rgod drag dar*.[56] Its leader is gTsang lha phu dar, a mountain located about 20 kilometers southwest of bZang bzang.[57] The other 12 members of the group and their locations are: 1) gNyan rje thang lha (gNyan chen thang lha)—located on the border of Ngas po and the Byang thang; 2) Yar lha sham po—Lho kha; 3) sTod lha ze ze—sTod lung; 4) sKyi lha bya rmang—Lho kha; 5) dByi lha gnyan po—Lho kha; 6) 'O lha rgyal bzang—in gTsang

near g.Yung drung gling dgon pa; 7) Nup lha brten drug—above g.Yung drung gling dgon pa; 8) rKong lha mthong drug—rKong po; 9) Dag lha sgam po—Dwags po; 10) Chib lha bya rmang—Lho kha; 11) Nyang lha phu dar—Nyang po; and 12) Drangs lha drangs rje—location unknown. In one version of the *Lha rgod drag dar* in the possession of sLop dpon 'Phrin las nyi ma, gNyan chen thang lha is recorded as the protective deity of the Cog ro clan.

The above list establishes a tier of southern Tibet extending from upper gTsang across to rKong po as the residence of the Bon mgur lha, a swath of territory that corresponds to the sPu rgyal kingdom. Given this geographical sequence, and the royal tradition associated with the mgur lha,[58] it can be established that they originated with the Yar lung kings. Interestingly, only Yar lha sham po and gNyan chen thang lha are uniformly present in all the mgur lha and srid pa chags pa'i lha and *Can lnga* listings: this has the effect of accenting their prominence in traditions associated with Yar lung dynastic times and helps to explain their continued renown in Tibet.

The mgur lha appear to be closely related to the sku lha (literally 'god of the body') guardian spirits. The sku lha who were also mountain divinities were important to the ancient btsan po because they acted as vital support for the king's life (Gibson: 35,77-82,200,221). The sku lha or sku bla generally belong to the gnyan class of deities (Norbu 1995: 227). As a royal divinity, gNyan chen thang lha was an important sku lha or divine protective force. The functions of the ancient sku lha have been recycled in the make-up of the mountain as a contemporary yul lha. In the Yar lung dynastic times, the protector gNyan chen thang lha must have helped to wield the aristocracy and commoners into a single politico-religious structure. Through the Tibetan kings and the gnyan class of deities, the sku lha, mgur lha and srid pa'i lha are closely related.

The Mother and Father of gNyan chen thang lha

As reported in the *Can lnga* origin myths of the Tibetan kings, 'O lde gung rgyal mated with Srin za sbyar lcam ma to produce gNyan chen thang lha. Srin was used as an allusion to the people of Nyang po and rKong po in the context of the Tibetan king and his allies vanquishing them (Karmay 1994a: 419). Srin are also a class of deities and demons, who in their female form are known as srin mo. The most celebrated story of the srin mo is that of the fearsome brag srin mo (rock ogress), who is assimilated with the man eating Indian rakshasas. In this legend the indigenous brag srin mo joins with an ape, the emanation of sPyan ras gzigs, to form the Tibetan race.[59]

The srin mo is also famous as the supine demoness (Gan rkyal du srin mo),[60] first mentioned in the 12th century *Mani bka' 'bum* (Gyatso: 37,38). In this legend, the territory of the sPu rgyal kings is perceived anthropomorphically as a supine demoness, who threatens the establishment of civilization. Thirteen temples are built in three concentric squares, consisting of a temple on each of the 12 corners and one in the middle, in the 'Plain of Milk' (Lhasa) or the heart of the srin mo, to suppress her destructive urges. The

temples on the four main quarters (ru chen po bzhi) correspond to her shoulders and hips; the four borders (mtha' 'dul) correspond to her knees and elbows; and the outer borders (yang 'dul) correspond to her hands and feet. Like her consort in the *Can lnga* myths, 'O lde gung rgyal, the srin mo in all her forms holds a dominant position in the mytho-religious heritage of ancient Tibet (see Chapter Two for more information on the srin mo). The word lcam in Srin za sbyar lcam ma denotes a female of a high rank, and ma indicates a mother or maternal qualities. Like the srin mo, lcam ma is connected with creative impulses and the process of cosmological manifestation.

Srin za sbyar lcam ma may be the mother of gNyan chen thang lha in the *Can lnga*, but in the relevant gsol kha texts her name is not found. Neither is she known to the 'brog pa of the region. In a text by the Fifth Dalai Lama and in other gsol kha, the mother of gNyan chen thang lha is stated to be g.Yu bya gshog gcig (One Winged Turquoise Bird)(Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma: fol. 15v; Text *Ka-23*, fol. 7v; Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 207).[61] However, she is not well known because her name is often omitted from the incense texts and only the 'brog pa most versed in their lore seem to have heard of her. It cannot be determined if she is an aboriginal mother deity of the A pa hor. Unfortunately, no information on her origins, function or personality have been forthcoming. However, in a skilfully composed synopsis of dGe lugs pa tradition protectors, she is identified with Srid pa'i rgyal mo (sLe lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje: 134). Whatever significance she may have had in the past has long been overshadowed by gNyan chen thang lha.

The mother of gNyan chen thang lha is not only described as a bird but as a turquoise one. Turquoise (g.yu) is a highly valued, indigenous semiprecious stone.[62] The inclusion of turquoise in the name of gNyan chen thang lha's mother imbues her with a sense of sanctity and auspiciousness. Why does g.Yu bya gshog gcig only has one wing? Disfigurement or possessing one of a pair of anatomical features is a well-known sign of divinity. For example, there is the one-legged deity (the'u rang rkang gcig) associated with Pe har, the one-eyed Buddhist Ral gcig ma, bdud with feet which face backwards, as well as blind and lame deities. Yet we must consider the possibility that the misshapen appearance of g.Yu bya shog gcig is the result of premeditated manipulation marking a change in the religious status of the country. Whether this event took place with the introduction of Buddhism or much earlier with the advent of early Bon is very difficult to determine. Disfigured birds and ornithological deities are not found in the cave art of gNam mtsho, nor apparently, anywhere else on the Byang thang, suggesting that the tradition is not aboriginal. It is striking that the turquoise bird mother survived the interpolation of Bon theogonies and the founding of Buddhism to have secured a place in the writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama in the late 17th century and in the myths of the 'brog pa up to the present day, albeit in an attenuated form.

The *Phur ba'i sgrub skor*, a text of sadhanas of important Bon protectors, contains a description of the theogony of gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho,[63] featuring another mother and father of the holy mountain. In this account, gNyan chen thang lha

and his ancestors originally lived in a castle among the clouds floating in space (dbyings)[64] in the land of the gods of existence (Lha yul srid pa). gNyan chen thang lha's grandfather is the g.Yung drung Master of the Mind (g.Yung drung yid kyi bdag); his grandmother, the Mistress Entrusted to Maintain the Race of the kLu (kLu rabs skos kyi bdag);[65] his mother, the Primal sMan Victorious Wife (sMan ye grogs rgyal), and his father, the Lord of Existence of the Race of the Lha (Lha rabs srid pa'i rje). United in marriage, the parents produce gNyan chen thang lha, known in the text as Thang lha of the Race of the Lha and Son of the gNyan (Lha rabs thang lha gnyan gyi bu). gNyan chen thang lha manifested as the White Conch Khyung Lord (Dung khyung dkar po rje), who possessed radiant wisdom in his mind in order that he could descend to earth. His grandfather, the ultimate progenitor of the gods, presented him with six magical articles before he descended to earth in order to subdue evil beings. These articles include 1) the upper part of a turquoise dragon head; 2) the lower part of a thog lcags animal head;[66] 3) a magical bomb (dzwo)[67] shaped like a bow (gnam ru); 4) a copper walking stick (ldan kar); 5) meteoric iron (gnam lcags) clothes fastener (sdig ru); and 6) tarnished blue article shaped like a human torso (khog tshe). The right horn of Dung khyung dkar po rje is encircled by 1,000 shrieking divine soldiers and his left horn by a 1,000 strong, battle-hungry army.

The text proceeds to inform us that, once in the earthly realm, gNyan chen thang lha searched for an appropriate home and located 'Dam shod snar mo, an area full of pointed snow mountains and blossoming flowers. He then assumed his original form as Thang lha rje, an iron-colored man with spots who was fond of sports and shooting thog lcags arrows. Wherever he went, he was accompanied by sleet storms. He lived for three months in sPo che during the winter, and for three months during the summer at Nang do.[68] The text describes gNyan chen thang lha as a mighty and strict guardian of g.Yung drung Bon and its practitioners. It also states that he married gNam mtsho, a very powerful and dignified iron-colored woman with gold ornaments on her head and turquoise eyebrows, who rode on a white hind. She had been blessed and empowered by gNam phyi gung rgyal. They had a son called gNyan sras thang lha (Thang lha, Son of the gNyan), who had the appearance of a crystal-colored yak with two golden horns and sparkling eyes. From the right side of his mouth, he sucked in and consumed 900 'dre, and from the left side of his mouth he sucked in and consumed 900 'dre mo. He made a terrible grunting sound which subdued both demons and deities. With an order from his father, gNyan sras thang lha separates btsan from their horse mounts and destroyed them. He was the subduer of all the btsan of the country.

gNyan chen thang lha and his relatives lived in the Lha yul srid pa which, according to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, is the primordial realm of the gods and is most fundamentally associated with the Loving Mother (Byams ma), a progenetrix of the Bon gods. Hence, gNyan chen thang lha in the Bon tradition is, either directly or indirectly, an ancestor of the human race. Looking at his parentage in the Bon tradition we can see

that he is related to the lha, gnyan and klu, the beings which characterize the three cosmological spheres, and that his origin is celestial.

As we have seen, in the Bon tradition gNyan chen thang lha manifested as a khyung. We find this same theme when reviewing Buddhist accounts of the Divine Dyads; therefore, it behooves us to closely analyze the mythological and religious components of the khyung. This is necessary in order to develop a better appreciation of the make-up of gNyan chen thang lha, because of the degree of interconnection between him and the khyung. The khyung has become assimilated with the garuda of India, the mount of Vishnu and Krsna. It is, however, the native eagle-like deity of Tibet which developed separately from the garuda until the introduction of Buddhism. The khyung also called nam mkha' lding (that which hovers in the sky) 'dab chags rgyal ba (king of the birds) and mkha' spyod dbang po (lord of the sky)—is considered the chief of the birds and was an important symbol of sovereignty for the kings of Zhang zhung.[69] gNyan chen thang lha is directly related to the khyung as protector, dgra lha and mountain deity, and as representation of the rDzogs chen view; but when he manifests as a khyung, he is vicariously related to all of the khyungs' symbolism.

gNyan chen thang lha as Other Deities

In the Buddhist tradition, Tibet's most loved bodhisattva, sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokitesvara), is called 'Lord of the Mountains' whose paradise is Po ta la, a lofty range of snowy mountains (Chogyam Trungpa: 56). gNyan chen thang lha's conversion to Buddhism is complete when he assumes the mantle of a bodhisattva.[70] The text by sTag lung Ngag dbang bkra shis dpal states that Zur phud lnga Dri za rgyal po (gNyan chen thang lha) obtained his bodhisattva vows from Gu ru rin po che and has attained the eighth stage (sa/bhumi) of bodhisattvahood (fol. 3r). He is considered a mind (thugs) emanation of Nam mkha'i snying po (Akashagarbha),[71] one of the eight major bodhisattvas (Sang rgyas sras chen brgyad). A description of Nam mkha'i snying po[72] reveals that his characteristic element is ether, and his main attribute is the sun (representing the universal illumination of the mind of this bodhisattva). He is usually depicted standing with his hands displaying the varada and vitarka mudras. Ordinarily, he is shown with the sun, supported by a lotus, resting on his right shoulder (representing method), and a book resting in a lotus upon his left shoulder (representing wisdom).

No longer merely a worldly mountain protector, gNyan chen thang lha is now the embodiment of the Mahayana doctrine. For Buddhists, his height is a concrete symbol of enlightenment. A magnificent distillation of the meaning of bodhisattva is presented in the *Sutra of the Heart of the Transcendent and the Victorious Perfection of Wisdom*. In one verse,[73] the Buddha, addressing his disciple, says:

> "..Therefore, Sariputra, because bodhisattvas have no attainments, they rely on, and abide in, the Perfection of Wisdom, and since their minds do not have

> obscurations, they have no fear. Having well transcended wrong views, they reach the sorrowless state."

With their incomparable qualities (stobs bskyed pa), bodhisattvas encapsulate Buddhist ideals and aspirations, forming a palpable link between religious practice and buddhahood. By extension, gNyan chen thang lha has evolved as an integral part of this process. As a bodhisattva, gNyan chen thang lha reaches the height of his glory and divinity, rising above his somewhat unpredictable and checkered personality as a worldly yul lha. According to local tradition, Shel mkhar phug (Cave of the Crystal Fort) is not only the soul cave (bla phug) of the mountain but also the place where Nam mkha'i snying po manifests himself. By identifying Nam mkha'i snying po with the soul of gNyan chen thang lha, the highest status has been effectively accorded gNyan chen thang lha in Buddhism. In other words, the personas of gNyan chen thang lha the yul lha and the bodhisattva have merged. In Buddhist doctrine, the bodhisattva is the dominant player in this intertwining of personalities, displacing many of the non-Buddhist characteristics of the mountain. This essentially is the final phase of the Buddhist transfiguration of gNyan chen thang lha, which permits him to be fully absorbed into the mainstream of Buddhism. It is important to note that the physical properties of gNyan chen thang lha are not the manifestation of Nam mkha'i snying po but rather an outward sign of his most virtuous qualities; that is, the manifestation of the bodhisattva is within the essential nature of the mountain's existence; its buddha nature, the birthright of all sentient beings, incarnate and disincarnate.

Despite gNyan chen thang lha's identification with the bodhisattva, the more earthy qualities of gNyan chen thang lha still dominate in the relationship the 'brog pa have with him. The worldly guardian's rule over the land and the affairs of its inhabitants is unchanged and unmitigated by Buddhist innovation. Essentially, the bodhisattva ascription is a symbolic one, used as a mechanism for the Buddhist appropriation of gNyan chen thang lha. This peripheral role of the bodhisattva is reflected in the fact that nowhere is a doctrinal or dialectical explanation of this attribution presented. This seems to be an indication of Buddhist scholars' tacit admission that the aboriginal personality of gNyan chen thang lha would always overshadow doctrinal considerations. Their aim was to temper this personality, bringing it into line with Buddhist ethics and conventions, and allow gNyan chen thang lha to continue to be a prominent force in Tibetan culture. This reconfiguring of the mountain also facilitated gNyan chen thang lha's participation in Buddhist religious practice and ritual.

The Fifth Dalai Lama records that gNyan chen thang lha has six different names derived from six gods of the form realm.[74] These gods are: 1) Shel ging dkar po; 2) gNam thel dkar po; 3) gNam lha byang chub sems pa; 4) Tshangs pa dung gi thor tshugs; 5) Dri za zur phud lnga pa; and 6) Khyab 'jug gnam mtsho'i bdag po (Text *Ka-24*, fol. 2r). This tradition of six names is derived from the rNying ma pa *Rin chen gter mdzod* (Treasury of Revealed Scriptures),[75] and it represents a common tradition in Buddhism of embellishing indigenous deities with doctrinal identifications. In reference

to gNyan chen thang lha, its purpose apparently was also to provide an indigenous residence for this collection of deities who became important in Tibet with the advent of Buddhism.

Until the introduction of Buddhism, the native pantheon was largely wedded to the land, the result of a significant proportion of the deities residing in natural entities and forces. The cult of the yul lha is a perfect example of this nature-bound orientation. Presumably, the early fathers of Buddhism, beginning with Gu ru rin po che and the rJe 'pangs lamas felt impelled to find a suitable geographical abode for their recently imported gods. As the five foreign deities synonymous with gNyan chen thang lha are prominent deities, they required a home commensurate with their status. It is important to note that, with the exception of Dri za zur phud lnga pa, these alternative spiritual egos are not vital to the 'brog pa traditions concerning gNyan chen thang lha, and have tended rather to remain in the more rarefied sphere of doctrinal Buddhism. This is corroborated by the fact that at least four of the six deities have a number of alternative homes throughout Tibet.

Dam can shel ging dkar po (the White Crystal Haughty One Bound to an Oath) belongs to the ging class of deities. Originally Bon po, they have become accepted primarily in the pantheon of the rNying ma and bKa' rgyud pa sects (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 278).[76] Shel ging dkar po (also spelled Shel 'gying dkar po) is not only variously identified with Tshangs pa and Pe har but also with the Bon srung ma Nyi pang sad. Both Nyi pang sad and Shel ging dkar po have the epithet Srog bdag rgyal po, which provides some insight into their pre-Buddhist nature. As guardians of the life-force, they could have been closely tied with yul lha like gNyan chen thang lha, who are also guardians of the life-force. Nyi pang sad, who has the ability to appear in many guises and is known by many different names, is portrayed as a mighty king wearing a white turban, holding a white banner of silk, and riding a white horse.[77]

Of the six gods imputed to gNyan chen thang lha, Dri za zur phud lnga pa's correspondence with the mountain is strongest. This is the name which lha supposedly know him by (Text *Ka-23*, fol. 7v). Dri ra zur phud lnga pa is the king of the Dri za, which literally means 'smell eaters'; and it is commonly said that they feed either on good or bad smells depending on their karma. As Dri za zur phud lnga pa, gNyan chen thang lha is brought into a close relationship with elemental deities such as the dri za and klu, which depict his mastery over chthonic forces; Dri za zur phud lnga pa, a subsidiary component of gNyan chen thang lha the yul lha, incorporates the sacred mountain's aboriginal personality into itself. In this form, he is the supreme embodiment of the genius loci.[78]

In this context, gNam lha byang chub sems pa (The Heavenly Deity Bodhisattva) is no different from Nam mkha'i snying po. gNam lha here refers to gNyan chen thang lha's identity as a celestial god or a lha of the gnam. gNam lha originally belonged to the pre-Buddhist cultural environment of deities associated with the firmament and celestial phenomena. In some myths of the origins of King gNya' khri btsan po, he is

descended from the gnam gyi lha (Haarh: 292,304,306). The identification of gNyan chen thang lha with gNam lha byang chub sems pa represents a stringent attempt to separate the mountain from the environment-bound spirits and his attendant unpredictable disposition. gNam lha byang chub sems pa, therefore, is a quintessential example of the syncretism of Buddhist and non-Buddhist traditions. Nonetheless, the design of this attribution was to squarely place an Indian Buddhist identity upon gNyan chen thang lha and, consequently, buttress the attempt to meld the persona of the mountain with Nam mkha'i snying po. This attempt by the Fifth Dalai Lama met with limited success on the ground. Buddhism could not penetrate the ancient core of convictions and conceptions pertaining to gNyan chen thang lha.

As another of the six names of gNyan chen thang lha, Khyab 'jug gnam mtsho'i rgyal po (Vishnu, the King of gNam mtsho) has a twofold significance: it establishes that the mountain is tantamount with Vishnu, a chief worldly god of the Buddhist pantheon, and that he is the overlord of gNam mtsho.[79] Khyab 'jug gnam mtsho'i rgyal po was appointed king of gNam mtsho to establish a patriarchal hierarchy and to clearly confirm that gNyan chen thang lha is superior to gNam mtsho. This patriarchal arrangement may not have always the norm. At this juncture, it will suffice to say that, at least since the founding of Buddhism, political and religious institutions have been male dominated and that this is reflected in this primacy of the male member of the Dyad.

Tshangs pa dung gi thor tshugs can, also known as Tshangs pa dkar po and Gong sa'i dbang po (Lord of the Higher Realm), is the Brahma of the Indian pantheon but with certain indigenous characteristics. Like Vishnu, Brahma is an important member of the Hindu pantheon, but in the Tibetan pantheon, he is classified as a worldly protector and is only of marginal importance. Shel 'gying dkar po is the same deity as Shel ging dkar po of the gNyan chen thang lha ritual texts, and apparently none other than Tshangs pa and, as we shall see, gNam thel dkar po.[80]

gNam thel dkar po is also known as gNam lha dkar po, gNam the'u dkar po, gNam thel dkar po and gNam thib dkar po and is an ancient form of Pe har (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 97). gNam thel dkar po is mentioned in the *kLu'bum* and is usually grouped with Sa the nag po (the black earth the) and Bar the khro bo (the variegated colored the of the intermediate sphere). *The Chronicle of the Fifth Dalai Lama* records three 'dre rgyal (royal demons) of white, black and yellow color, who originated in the Yu gur country (Eastern Turkestan) and evidently are the same three types of the (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 98). The the'u rang (diminutive form of thel) are found in the retinue of several dharmapalas and are often thought to have an evil nature, causing illness, quarrels and hailstorms (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 282,283).[81]

Local tradition has it that gNam thel dkar po is a Hor pa[82] deity who was brought to Tibet with the Hor pa invasions of Genghiz Khan.[83] The Hor pa tribes had a significant impact on the culture of the eastern Byang thang which came to be known as Western Hor (Nub Hor). This dominance extended into the 'Dam gzhung valley as the oral

histories and clan names in this area attest.[84] Nevertheless, this Hor pa influence is attenuated on the 'inner side' of gNyan chen thang lha, in gNam ru county and further west in gNag tshang, with the notable exception of its ruling family. Although there are Hor pa clans west of gNam mtsho and even Hor pa enclaves in far western Tibet, they appear to be in the minority west of gNyan chen thang lha. As we shall see in the geographic survey of the Divine Dyads, the clan lineages of these more western areas are frequently connected with Zhang zhung deities.

The Circle of gNyan chen thang lha

In the gNyan chen thang lha ritual texts, the principle wife of the mountain is gNam mtsho, who is the subject of the next chapter. In Buddhist tradition, she is often depicted seated to the left side of gNyan chen thang lha (a typical Indian depiction) in the middle of his crystal palace. However, gNyan chen thang lha is a polygamous god, who has coupled with several other consorts. The most important of these is the sman, Lha mo mtsho dar (the Frozen Lake Goddess), who in the rNying ma pa tradition is called his elder wife (Khyab kyi ngang shos ma).[85] In the primary sTag lung text by Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma, her attribute is a white and turquoise whip (fol. 17r).

Lha mo mtsho dar is well known to the 'brog pa of the region as an indigenous deity; in all likelihood, her fame is also due to the preponderance of rNying ma pa practitioners in the region. Lha mo mtsho dar is the largest lake in a group of glacial tarns located at the foot of the gNyan chen thang lha massif, south of gNam mtsho. In Tibetan culture, the first wife of a polygamous marriage enjoys the highest status among all the wives, which here is reflected in geographical terms, with Lha mo mtsho dar being higher and in closer proximity to gNyan chen thang lha than gNam mtsho. In the rNying ma tradition, Lha mo mtsho dar has become the dwelling place of the powerful goddess Lha mo 'od zer can ma (the Radiant Goddess)[86] or the Indian deity Marici, who is customarily invoked at sunrise.[87]

There are also many female mountains in Tibet, at least three or four of which are consorts of gNyan chen thang lha. There are almost certainly others, of local importance, which have not yet come to light. Approximately 240 kilometers to the southwest of gNyan chen thang lha, in rGya tsha county, is the mountain rGya tsha ri, a concubine of gNyan chen thang lha, who had an illicit affair with another mountain leading to the birth of a daughter, Mount Shel mkhar (Ma 1993: 194). This long-distance affair of gNyan chen thang lha illustrates an important point about the Divine Dyads: they are often mythically interconnected with very distant geographical features. The reason for this apparently lies in the inherent urge in communities to carve out an unique identity. This desire of villages in Tibet to emphasis their separateness (a mechanism that fosters local solidarity) is defined in geographical terms. Communities often select distant sacred features because it is unlikely that proximate communities would have chosen the same geographical milestone.

Another consort of gNyan chen thang lha is the 7,048-meter-tall mountain, Jo mo gangs dkar, located 75 kilometers southeast of gNyan chen thang lha, which is in the same range of mountains. The product of this union was a son, a smaller mountain (Ma 1993: 194). gNyan chen thang lha is also said to have conjoined with Bazi peak at Yangs pa can (Ma 1991: 16). dPa' mtsho, located 40 kilometers north of gNam mtsho, is thought by certain 'brog pa to be another consort of gNyan chen thang lha. There is a legend surrounding gLang chen ri (Elephant mountain), located in the Dos pa township of dPal mgon county (Ma 1991: 31,32): at the time the Yar lung dynasty was expanding northwards, he was brutalized by gNyan chen thang lha after trying to win the hand of the maiden dPa' mtsho. gLang chen ri was pursued by gNyan chen thang lha's minister Babu, a copper dog and iron dog. He was shot with a bow and arrow and his organs, which poured out of the wound, formed various topographical features.

gNyan chen thang lha's best known offspring came from his union with A ma g.yu sdel, a small mountain in the vicinity of Grwa rgyun dgon pa. The product of this relationship was rDo rje rkyang khra, gNam ru's most famous native btsan. His place of residence is an isolated hillock in the middle of a 35-kilometer-long plain north of dPa' mtsho. In his btsan khang, there is an image of the god, depicted as a typical btsan—that is, a bellicose red man carrying a banner and mounted on a steed. Like his father, he is most probably a very ancient protector of the region. It is noteworthy that the great gnyan, gNyan chen thang lha, fathered a btsan. Is this allegorical evidence for the gnyan being more ancient than the btsan class of deities?

The gnyan and the btsan are both powerful land-based spirits who occupy the middle sphere and are almost indistinguishable from one another. The major difference between them appears to be that the bstan are more prolifically distributed. In ancient times, the king was known as the btsan po (the mighty one) and was considered the earthly reflection of the divine btsan (Tucci 1949: 727). He was also the gnyan po (the dignified/awe-inspiring one), an epithet with a similar application to btsan po.

As we have seen, gNyan chen thang lha's polygamous proclivities have expanded his influence to encompass areas outside his immediate neighborhood. This interbreeding of mountains and lakes establishes a far-reaching interdependency and is indicative of the matrix of numinous physical landforms which overlay the Byang thang and other regions of Tibet.

The religious traditions associated with gNyan chen thang lha have evolved to resemble Buddhist practices, a development which required centuries of effort. One way this was accomplished was by transforming native ritualism to conform to Vajrayana conventions. The Fifth Dalai Lama was most instrumental in this regard. All five of his works exclusively devoted to gNyan chen thang lha contain liturgical, conceptual and iconographic elements directly derived from the Vajrayana tradition. The Fifth Dalai Lama created gNyan chen thang lha as a deity who resembled and behaved like a tantric deity. One outcome of this was the divesting of much of gNyan chen thang lha's pre-Buddhist identity. The works of the Fifth Dalai Lama are devoid of much of the ancient

lore which survives in the earlier rNying ma pa gter ma texts. This change of focus was symbolic of Buddhism's triumph over indigenous deities and thus functioned to increase the stature of the religion. Secondly, it helped foster ecclesiastical uniformity which the dGe lugs pa sect presided over. This had the effect of diminishing other traditions. Thirdly, it had the effect of psychologically removing some of the unpredictability inherent in the worship of deities associated with natural phenomena.

The best example of the Vajrayana gNyan chen thang lha is the textual tradition of the visualization of the nine aspects (rnam gyur dgu). These consist of a central gNyan chen thang lha figure in his divine palace with his wife, gNam mtsho, at his left side, flanked by eight subsidiary gNyan chen thang lha figures called gNam lha brgyad. These subsidiary figures correspond to the four cardinal and four intermediate directions, and reside on the crystal stupa-like mountains alluded to in the description of gNyan chen thang lha's palace. They form a symmetrical arrangement of deities or mandala. The four gNam lha of the cardinal directions repeat the order and iconography of the main gNyan chen thang lha,[88] while the four gNam lha of the intermediate directions also fit into the symmetry of the mandala, but their correspondence with the central figure is reduced because of the incorporation of Bon and aboriginal elements into their forms.

Not only does the mandala of gNam lha in configuration conform to Vajrayana tenets, but so do the activities of its constituent members. The gNam lha of the cardinal directions, each with its characteristic color, embody the 'phrin las bzhi or 'phrin las rnam bzhi (the four deeds) of the tantric tradition, which are the various modes utilized by deities to effect positive changes in their devotees. The 'phrin las bzhi are also the four methods used by religious practitioners to impel a deity to work on their behalf. These four deeds are: 1) zhi ba (pacifying); 2) rgyas pa (expanding); 3) dbang po (overpowering); and 4) khro bo/drag po (wrathfully destroying). They represent the ability of tantric deities to overcome and eliminate every kind of obstacle or disturbance.

The gNam lha brgyad are present in a number of ritual texts,[89] but the most complete description of them is found in the bskang ba text, *Dri za'i rgyal po rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal la gyi rten mdos. bsKang mdos. bZlog mdos kyi rim pa rgyal ba gzig gi rnam 'phrul.*[90] In the center of the mandala is the main gNyan chen thang lha figure, Lha chen rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal (the Great Lha, the Force of the Blazing Vajra)(Text *Ka-23*, fol. 7v). This 'secret name' is a popular appellation of the mountain god. The text does not spell it out, but it is implied that the gNam lha either face the main gNyan chen thang lha image or look out from it in accordance with tantric stereotypes. The four gNam lha of the cardinal directions all have one head, two hands and three eyes, and wear a jeweled crown, golden girdle and Hor pa footwear.[91]

Although the arrangement of the cardinal aspects of gNyan chen thang lha is in accordance with the tantric 'phrin las bzhi, the benevolent and wrathful qualities enumerated here mirror the qualities of the hallowed mountain in his fundamental yul lha identity. The four aspects of gNyan chen thang lha of the intermediate directions are

modified pre-Buddhist deities that were incorporated into the tantric scheme of the lamaist schools. Three of these four deities provide some insight into the nature of pre-Buddhist mythology and religion surrounding gNyan chen thang lha that survived the Buddhist remodeling of the mountain.[92]

A number of animal emanations are included in the Fifth Dalai Lama's description of the nine aspects of gNyan chen thang lha (fol. 5r). Above the central gNyan chen thang lha is the chief emanation or projection of the mountain, a black khyung with nine heads, who is said to destroy the evil-causing klu and sa bdag. His nine heads represent the nine aspects of gNyan chen thang lha. The eight subsidiary forms each have a white falcon (khra)[93] on their right side, and iron scorpions with flaming tails behind them. On their left side, each of them has a white wolf. By incorporating zoomorphic projections into the text, the Fifth Dalai Lama made another concession to the much older tradition of bestiovestism. This was a small concession, however, as these animals could easily be blurred with zoomorphic elements in Vajrayana iconography. The Bon tradition also records animal companions of gNyan chen thang lha, including a female dragon to his left, a white lion trailing behind him, and a soaring golden khyung overhead.[94] A different set of emanations are recorded in a rNying ma pa text, including a white yak, white falcon, a scorpion with nine heads made of meteoric metal and scorpions of gold, silver, copper and turquoise.[95] In China, references to polycephalic mountain guardians preceded those we find in the text above by many centuries.[96]

While the texts do not always specify that the animals accompanying gNyan chen thang lha are his emanations (sprul pa), it is understood that they belong to the same essence as the mountain, and thus are his projections or personifications. These zoomorphic materializations are yet more evidence for the close spiritual relationship that existed in ancient times between animals and the mountain. Today, the scarce white falcon and the extremely rare white wolf are highly regarded by the 'brog pa and still have magical connotations. The life of special animals and the life of the gNyan chen thang lha are interwoven because of the ability of the mountain to project his bla into their forms.

In the text by sTag lung Ngag dbang bkra shis dpal, animals act as the base for various emanations originating from the mountain (fol. 4v,4r). In the space (steng) above the mountain, divine warriors appear from a khyung and lion, and messengers (pho nya) from a fierce and robust yak appear. On the left side of the mountain, gnyan warriors appear from a great lion, while on the right side btsan warriors appear from a great dazzling tiger. Below the mountain, bdud warriors appear from a fierce bear, dred (wild man-ape), 'phur (wild dog) and wolf. Outside of the mountain klu warriors appear from a leering iron falcon. The same text states that when gNyan chen thang lha comes from the sky (nam mkha'), he rides a khyung and his messengers are the planets (gza') and stars (rgyu dkar)(fol. 11r).

Orally preserved legends speak of the mountain manifesting in the guise of an A pa

hor. From time to time great saints, adepts and even ordinary people have had visitations from gNyan chen thang lha. They tend to be fleeting and awe-inspiring but sometimes are of longer duration. There are stories of a mountain god walking into a camp like an ordinary shepherd, mingling with the people, and then disappearing. The epiphany of the pacific gNyan chen thang lha is a joyous and highly auspicious event. However, his fickle nature usually dissuades the 'brog pa from actively seeking him out in human form. His appearance as a human is a rare event, likened to five rainbows appearing simultaneously in the sky.

In conjunction with the above description of the gNam lha brgyad, there is mention of the circle of 360 lha, the lha 'khor of the central gNyan chen thang lha figure (Text *Ka-26*, fol.4r), a well-known feature of the sacred geography of the mountain. There is a popular tradition that these 360 lha represent 360 peaks of the gNyan chen thang lha range. This tradition was noted by Kishen Singh during his exploration of the region in 1872 (Kishen Singh: 136). In the texts of the Fifth Dalai Lama the circle around gNyan chen thang lha is occupied by his military.[97] On the right side of gNyan chen thang lha is his general with turquoise-colored eyebrows; on his left side is the youthful general, with a turquoise ornament (zur phud) in his hair; in front of him is a white general with a turquoise hair clip (g.yu'i thor cog); and behind him is a wrathful general of blue iron. Each of the generals has an army of 10,000 soldiers.

In the Bon *Ti se pom ra thang lha gsum gyi bsang bskong*,[98] gNyan chen thang lha is described as having an army of 100,000 gnyan and 100,000 gnyan messengers. The messengers and army are composed of white men with white clothes, riding white horses, and carrying white banners held overhead. They are all shouting "Ki so cha" and the hoofs of the charging horses make a thunderous sound, shaking the very foundations of heaven and earth. These descriptions of gNyan chen thang lha's army emphasize the heroic and martial qualities the mountain possesses, a rallying point through the ages for the martial component of 'brog pa culture. The war-like nature of the Imperial era Tibetans and their mountains would have been mutually reinforcing. In subsequent periods this relationship continued to define martial culture, although on a less organized level.

In the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Lha mchog rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi 'phrin las brgya phrag nyid ngos 'dzin pa'i snang gsal*, a brief description, attributed to Ratna gling pa (1403-1478) of the four sides (phyogs bzhi) of the mountain is given (fol. 21r). The east face of the mountain is said to look like a crystal tiered offering mandala; the south face, like a drawn curtain; the west face, like a white tent; and the north face like a white snow lion jumping in the sky. Some 'brog pa know this passage by the Fifth Dalai Lama by heart, while others have their own personal vision of the appearance of the mountain. In the text by the sTag lung Ngag dbang bkra shis dpal, the following description of the phyogs bzhi is given (fol. 3v): east—heap of crystal; south—drawn white curtain; west—a row of glorious gtor ma; and north—jumping white snow lion.

These metaphorical descriptions illustrate the fabulous qualities of gNyan chen

thang lha in the minds of the 'brog pa. This lyrical view of sacred objects is also integral to the attitudes and values of the native people regarding the conception and utilization of natural resources. Traditionally, the exploitation of natural resources had to be justified not only in terms of expediency, but in keeping with their place and function in the sacred geography.

There are several other forms and names of gNyan chen thang lha.[99] A popular Bon name for the mountain is Thang lha yar bzhur (Thang lha the Snub-nosed One), which evidently refers to the mountain's flat summit ridge. In a form as Srid pa'i lha chen gnyan gyi gtso (The Great God of Existence, the Chief of gNyan), he wears a white dress and turban (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 207). When he carries out the work of a wrathful deity he assumes a terrific form, wearing a harness and helmet of carnelian, a black bear skin, and carrying a sword of meteoric iron and a bow and arrows, the emblems of the dpa' bo (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 207). He is also called Dam can kun gyi lha (the Lha of All Oath Keepers), and Bod khams gnas chen brgyad kyi bdag po (Master of the Eight Great Places of Pilgrimage of the Tibetan Realm)(Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 207). gNyan chen thang lha is also known by the appellation Yar shur gnyan gyi lha when he is the ruling divinity of his range of mountains and may be the leader of the Ser bdag bcu brgyad (Eighteen Masters of Hail)(Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 205). A popular 'brog pa folk song has this to say about the neighboring mountains:

Rin chen gnyan chen thang lha
Ri 'phran mang pos mtha' bskor red.
De la skor le ma red,
'Khor le red,
De la 'khor yang las kyi 'khor le red.

(Encircling the jewel gNyan chen thang lha
are many subsidiary mountains.
They are not contrived to circle around it
but circle through the agency of fate.
Such is the circle.)

In the gsol mchod hymn attributed to Gu ru rin po che, *'Dzam gling spyi bsangs*, the pre-Buddhist retinue of gNyan chen thang lha has been preserved, and affords a fascinating window into the distant past (fol. 3v,4r). Recorded in this text is the tradition of the four generals of gNyan chen thang lha, four lesser sacred mountains and yul lha in their own right, within his compass. They are: 1) west—Khong khyim zhal dkar (the Householder with the White Face), riding a horse of the btsan, located approximately 80 kilometers west in gShen sger; 2) east—bSam gtan gangs bzang (Good Meditation Mountain), holding a white banner, located approximately 110 kilometers to the northeast not far from the settlement and pass of gSang gzhung; 3) south—Dam can mgar nag (Black Smith Oath Keeper), holding a black flag, located approximately 40 kilometers

to the west-southwest in gShen sger; and 4) north—sPo che be yang holding a yellow banner, located approximately 80 kilometers to the west-northwest in sPo che. All four of these mountains are situated in the Byang thang, which lends credence to the hypothesis that they were originally part of a Zhang zhung based tradition.

The *'Dzam gling spyi bsangs* notes that gNyan chen thang lha has two main assistants: the one on his left side is named sBid lha, and brandishes a spear, and the assistant on his right side is called Yab btsan zhal dkar (Father bTsan with the White Face), who is described as having a white face and carrying a lasso. In the text there is also a priest-warrior figure, always present behind the mountain god named Ni ra ya mar. 'Brong snyan ser po (the Renowned Yellow Wild Yak), who rides a tigress and is a maternal uncle of gNyan chen thang lha, is also recorded. There is some resemblance between his name and that name of the 30th king of the Yar lung dynasty, 'Brong gnyan lde ru, in that they both contain the word for wild yak. This type of name passed into disuse long ago. The younger brother of gNyan chen thang lha is recorded as Thang sprin nor dkar (the White Jewel Cloud of the Plain), and his sister as 'Bri lam gangs bzang (the Good Mountain of the Female Yak Road).[100] The son of the mountain is recorded as Thang lha'i phyor po (the Wealthy Lha of the Plain).[101]

Also in *'Dzam gling spyi bsangs* we find the a goat herder Khyo ra btsan po (the Mighty Man of the Corral); the female yak shepherdess, Lag gsor phyug mo (She of Riches Who Waves Her Hands); and the dog-keeper, Ya (sic g.Ya') dmar stag btsan (the Mighty Tiger of the Red Slates). The minister of the interior, 'Gul ring 'phag rtag (Eternal Elevated Pulsation), riding a blue horse with a turquoise mane is also mentioned, as is the foreign minister rMa chen spom ra, wearing a white cloak with red trim around the sleeves. It seems wishful thinking to include rMa chen spom ra in the retinue of gNyan chen thang lha, as it is located a great distance away and is a mighty yul lha in its own right. This attribution may reflect an idealistic view of gNyan chen thang lha's glory, or perhaps old territorial struggles and pretensions implied are here.

In the rNying ma pa text entitled *Padma dbang gi gter sung cho. rDo rje 'bar ba'i gsol mchod*, additional members of gNyan chen thang lha's circle are provided.[102] His gatekeeper is g.Ya' ma stag slag chen ma (Great Mother of the Slates with the Tiger Skin Dress); his shepherd, Lha khang chung shel dkar (White Crystal Little Chapel); his son, Thang sras 'chol ba (the Entrusted Son of Thang lha); and a female relative, Thang 'bri ngur ma (The Female Yak-Duck of the Plain). This text also records that gNyan chen thang lha has inner, intermediate and outer circles of ministers, who are characterized by gold, silver and conch respectively. Finally, it mentions 60 servants comprising klu, btsan, dmu and lha. From the two rNying ma pa texts above, we can see that the retinue of gNyan chen thang lha contains individuals with picturesque and archaic names. The real significance, however, is the possibility that these descriptions of the family, government, workers and livestock of gNyan chen thang lha mirror social realities prevailing in the pre-Buddhist period.

In the primary sTag lung text compiled by Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma, a list of

archaic figures are included in the retinue of the mountain (fol. 16r-19r). Many of these are contained in the above two texts, although spellings and descriptions often vary. On the right side of gNyan chen thang lha is Za ? skyes bu drug,[103] a youthful iron man with an iron horse, and on the left side is sBrid lha, holder of a spear. There is also g.Ya btsan zhal dkar, who is described as indicative of the traces of ancient deities (snon gi shul mtshan pa). Other members of the retinue are Gro ser ljang bu can, who is mounted on an erect magenta horse with white hoofs, and Ne'u ra g.yal dmar who wears purple armor.

gNyan chen thang lha's son, Thang sras 'mchor po, bears crystal eggs and his brother Thang 'brings ngur pa rides a vermilion colored horse with white hoofs.[104] The mountain's maternal uncle 'Brong gnyen (sic gnyan), thang po rides a horse with a white and turquoise mane (rngogs). His foreign minister sPo chen yor ba bears a white shield or breast plate (phub) and his interior minister 'Gul ring phrag stag rides a horse with a blue mane. The guard on the left side of the entrance to his palace is sPos phu gser steng, and the guard on the right side Tsam (sic rTsal) chen lha rgod who wears armor of bse (hardened leather). His sister 'Bri lam sman cig ma comes from 'Bri lam gangs bzang. The mountain's shepherd and keeper of fortune (g.yang) is also known as g.Ya btsan zhal dkar ba and his horse keeper and lord of subjects is Gyang lha btsan po.[105] His keeper of yaks is 'Bri lag sor phyug mo and his keeper of hybrid yaks (mdzo and tol) is sKyes bu rta bcig. Finally, his goat herder (sku lha'i ra rje [sic rdzes]) is 'Phyor ba rtse gsum and his dog keeper (sku lha'i khyi rdzes) is 'Brong khe se bo.

Are these incense hymns based on the life of one or more ancient Byang thang potentates? Species of livestock alluded to in the texts still predominate in the 'brog pa economy. The stress placed on martial culture alluded to above was a social reality until the modern era. The inspiration for the mythology of the gNyan chen thang lha was no doubt derived from contemporaneous environmental, social, political, cultural and economic realities. These texts are thus an index of the historical climate in which the myths originated; and rather than merely mythological accounts, incense hymns such as these are a type of historical record.

The Spirit-mediumship of gNyan chen thang lha

One of the most intimate, potent and ancient relationships the 'brog pa have with gNyan chen thang lha is that of spirit-mediumship. Spirit-mediums (lha pa or dpa' bo) are believed to have the ability to commune with relatives of gNyan chen thang lha and his retinue for the benefit of their community. Only lesser forms of the mountain can be accessed; gNyan chen thang lha himself does not condescend to communicate in this fashion. gNam mtsho is also beyond the access of the mediums; not even her subsidiary forms can be reached.

Generally speaking, spirit-mediumship involves the transference of the spirit, or consciousness, of a deity to its human receptacle, in the process of which the ordinary

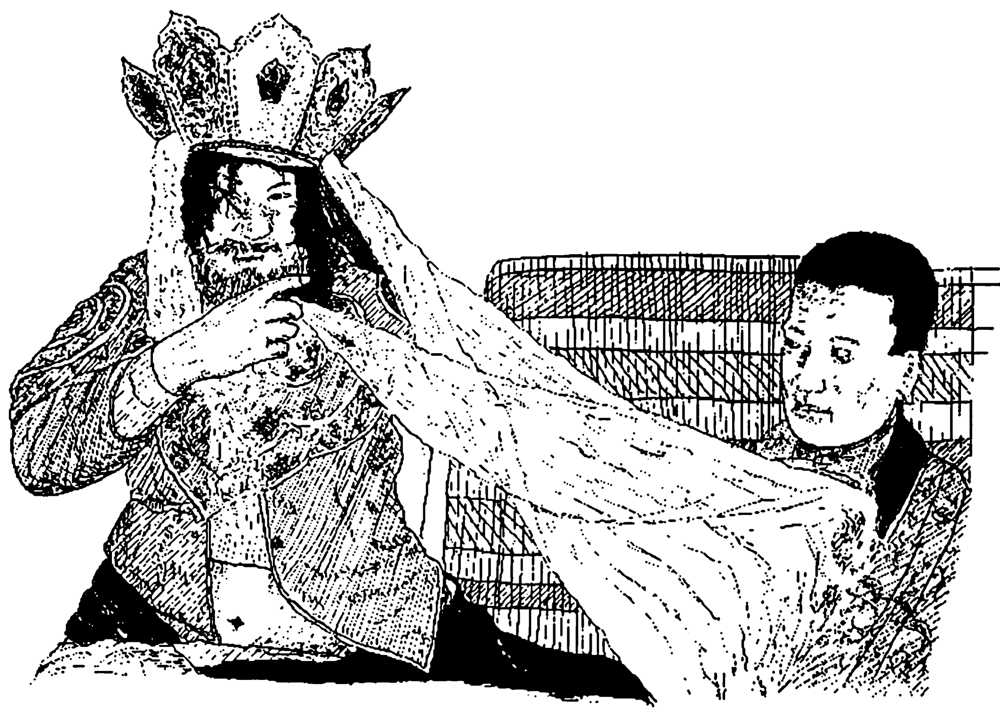
consciousness and personality of the medium are displaced in order to accommodate the one temporarily imposed upon him or her. The primary purpose would be to cure illness and, to a lesser extent, for prognostication. It was through the medium that the deity effected these cures and prophesies. In the environs of gNyan chen thang lha, as in much of contemporary Tibet, spirit-mediumship is in an state of decline, the number of practitioners rapidly dwindling, mainly as a result of the stiff censure they face from the Communist regime in Tibet. The spirit-mediums believe that they risk harassment and even imprisonment for their work. In pre-Communist times, it seems that every camp had occasional recourse to the mediums, whose number were sufficient for the needs of the 'brog pa.

On the south side of gNyan chen thang lha only one lha pa was reported, a man of advanced age in the sNying grong township. He is a medium for rDo rje rkyang khra, a son of gNyan chen thang lha, and is reputedly highly respected, accurate and effective in his work. The most famous spirit-medium on the north shore of gNam mtsho was a man called dPa' chen (short form of dpa' bo chen po), who lived to about the age of 60. Until his death some 30 years ago, he had been a medium for Thang lha sras phyor po. One of the last spirit-mediums at gNam mtsho who died several years ago, in her 50s, was A thog lha mo; she reportedly was inhabited by male deities when in trance. One of the more respected and powerful mediums of the previous generation was the incarnate lama Rig 'dzin grags sngags gling ba, whose present emanation is bKra shis do rDzogs chen rin po che. He was a spirit-medium for gNyan chen thang lha's son, Thang sras 'chol ba, and for Grib btsan, one of the Rol pa skya bdun and protectors of bKra shis do.

One of his disciples is a sngags pa currently around 60 years old who resides in a village on the north side of gNam mtsho. The lha pa is a married man and has uncut hair, a tradition of lha pa in the region, as well as in many other places in Tibet, in the Himalayan borderlands, and in central and north Asia. According to the spirit-medium, the lha pa must have a special calling and possess a particular kind of stable pulse. He or she must also have a strong constitution and be of good virtue. This particular lha pa acts for the same deities as Rig 'dzin grags sngags gling ba.[106] To prepare for the trances, which are conducted in the utmost secrecy, the lha pa dons a brocade mantle and a hat with five panels called a rigs lnga. He used to also wear a bronze mirror, but this was confiscated during the Cultural Revolution. Throughout the ceremony large amounts of juniper incense are burnt. After the initial preparations, the lha pa rings his small bell called a khro lo with his left hand and bangs his hanging drum (rnga) with an 'S'-shaped drum stick while reading prayers to the deities of the trance. The source for these invocations include a rNying ma pa gNyan chen thang lha offering text[107] and the *bDag drag dus kyi pho nya*, a text of the Rol pa skya bdun composed by 'Mang ris pan chen. While the lha pa is intoning his prayers and playing his instruments, he is possessed by one of his oracular deities.

Once in trance his behavior markedly changes and his movements become erratic and strident. He is potentially violent and those in attendance must take care not to

earn his ire. During the time he is under the influence of the deity, he has the ability to predict the future course of events. His main role, however, is to heal patients, which he does with the aid of an offering scarf (kha btags). One end of the scarf is placed on the affected area of the patient's body while the oracle sucks and tugs on the other end. This procedure is believed to liberate the impurity or malevolent force which is causing the illness. The seance can last up to one hour and leaves the lha pa feeling exhausted.



Spirit-medium for gNyan chen thang lha

Spirit-mediums for gNyan chen thang lha are also found in other areas of the Byang thang, inclusive of the rTa rgo region. At rTa rgo one local dpa' bo became possessed by three subsidiary forms of gNyan chen thang lha including Thang sras phyor po, his son, also known as Thang sras mchor po (the Handsome Son of Thang lha); Thang lha'i 'brong 'dur rog po (Thang lha, the Roving Dark Colored Wild Yak of the Cemetery); and Thang lha'i ngam thod rkyang (Thang lha's Wild Horse Skull of the Underworld). The latter two oracular deities are especially noteworthy because they demonstrate that zoomorphic forms of gNyan chen thang lha are part of the cult of spirit-mediumship.

A landmark study in the early 1970s of 'brog pa spirit-mediums in exile in Nepal[108] found that the mirror (me long) is the most important object of the dpa' bo's altar and is called gling, referring to the entire world. Often three mirrors were used called the phyi

gling (outer world), bar gling (intermediate world) and nang gling (inner world), and represented the three spheres of existence respectively inhabited by the lha, btsan and klu. If only one mirror was used, it was divided into three concentric spheres to represent the tripartite cosmos. The mirror is where the deities of the seance reside, aligned in rows converging in the rear of the me long, and where the spirit-medium's consciousness is kept while he is possessed by the deity.

The study revealed that the consciousness of the spirit-medium (rnam shes) leaves the body through a channel (dbu ma) at the top of the skull, which goes channel goes through the middle of the chest and along the fourth finger of each hand. This channel is kept clean by special deities called rtsa lam gtsang mkha, and other deities, called rtsa bdag, guard the channel openings. These rtsa bdag include gNyan chen thang lha deities and are passed on from one dpa' bo to another. In one seance, observed in the Nepal study, the spirit-medium became possessed by Thang lha dkar po (White Yak Emanation of the Deity), who selected the remedial deity, Thang lha'i khyi rgod rap pa (the Wild Dog of Thang lha), in order to cure patients bitten by a mad dog. When possessed by this deity, the dpa' bo acted like a dog, barking, howling, sniffing the air, and baring his teeth. During the initiation of a dpa' bo, the adept became possessed by Thang lha'i mchor po. The spirit-mediums of the study spoke of 36 btsan involved in possession, including a group at gNyan chen thang lha and a group at rTa rgo rin po che.

The bonds between humans and mountain, which were renewed at every trance, formed the basis of an epiphany that helped to define a vital aspect of the religion of the 'brog pa. The culture of spirit-mediums dates back to a time before gNyan chen thang lha was relegated to a marginal role in the spiritual life of the 'brog pa, and when he was a dominant force in their religious beliefs. Within this practice today, the integral relationship of the mountain and people, and human and non-human dimensions of life, is still evident.

In the remote past, gNyan chen thang lha might have been a supreme member of the pantheon of the A pa hor, a kind of summa deus or oversoul who mediated in every facet of their lives and who represented their highest ontological and cosmological truths. In the same way that he was omnipresent among the living, so might he have been among the dead—a deity, or paradise, catering to the needs of those who had departed the world of people to join the after-world of the mountain in all its ethereal glory. gNyan chen thang lha was the nexus of life and death: community and self, giving and receiving, war and peace. Today, gNyan chen thang lha is still one of Tibet's most vital links between the past and present.

End Notes:

1. For an analysis of the myth of the descent of the first Tibetan king to earth, see Haarh; Tucci 1949.
2. According to the *Old Tibet Chronicle*, King Srong btsan sgam po's father, gNam ri slon mtshan, conquered the region of rTsang Bod, now believed to be the equivalent of modern dBus gtsang or central Tibet. The *Old Tibet Chronicle* also declares that the Tibet of this period was called sPu, not Bod. Bod, the modern name for Tibet, was acquired through the conquest of the rich northern pastoral lands. See Beckwith 1987, p. 8.
3. See *Lha mchog rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi 'phrin las brgya phrag nyid ngos 'dzin pa'i snang gsal* (The Clear Appearance of the Recognition of the One Hundred Religious Activities Pertaining to the Great God Powerful Blazing Thunderbolt), Text *Ka-23* of the Fifth Dalai Lama's *gSung 'bum dkar chag* (Collected Works), gSung nang ma (Inner speech series), hereafter referred to as Text *Ka-23*, folio 9v of the 25 folios of this text. The colophon of this text reads: "[This text] was composed by the tantric practitioner of Za hor Zil gnon bzhad pa rtsal in the waxing moon of the Seventh month in the Wood Tiger Year (1674) beginning from the First Day under the star rGyal phur to the Fifth day of the same month under the star Gro bzhin in the heavenly appointed great palace of dMar po ri. The scribe who copied it was the tantric monk 'Jam dbyangs grags pa. dPal ldan lha chen tshangs (dPal ldan lha mo) protect and preserve it during the six times of the day and night." ((Text name) 'di ni za hor gyi sngags btsun zil gnon bzhad pa rtsal gyis kun dga' zhes pa shing stag hor zla bdun pa'i dkar cha'i dga' ba dang po rgyal phur gyi thog la dbu btsugs zla ba de ga'i tshes lnga zla ba (sic dkar ma) gro bzhin 'dzom pa'i 'phrod dge bar gnam bskos kyi pho brang chen po dmar po rir grub par sbyar ba'i ye ge pa ni rigs 'dzin gyi btsun pa 'jam dbyangs grags pas bgyis pa dpal ldan lha chen tshangs pas nyin mtshan dus drug tu bsrung zhing skyob pa'i rgyur gyur cig). In folio 25 v the Fifth Dalai Lama provides valuable information on the sources used in compiling the text. He writes: "Before the time of Chos rgyal Mang'i mtshan (King Mang srong mang btsan, the grandson of King Srong btsan sgam po) this offering text of Lha chen (gNyan chen thang lha) was based on oral not written sources and I am not aware of a continuous textual tradition. However, there is one large work composed by Rigs 'dzin ngag gi dbang po chos rgyal btsan pa'i rgyal mtshan who was a reincarnation of Zhang sna nam (a minister during the reign of King Khri srong lde btsan) but it is hard to understand. Due to my devotion for the protector I composed this work mainly based on the *mChod rten tshangs pa lha'i shel gyi rnga bo che* but also on some rediscovered texts and on the transmissions of lamas." Unfortunately, these parent texts referred to by the Fifth Dalai Lama seem to no longer be extant. The Fifth Dalai Lama borrowed heavily from Yul mo ba gsom pas mdzad, and to a lesser extent from Ratna gling pa, as noted in the text.
4. The four administrative divisions of the dBus gtsang ru bzhi were dBu ru, g.Yas ru, g.Yo ru, and Ru lag. See Norbu 1995, p. 235.
5. According to the *Old Tibet Chronicle*, in the period before King gNam ri slon mtshan, the powerful overlord of Ngas po (sKyi chu and sPhan po regions) was a vassal of the Lig myi

dynasty, whose Zhang zhung confederation ruled much of Tibet at the time. Circa 621 the unified central Tibetan state under sPu rgyal gNam ri slon mtshan extended as far as Kyung po in the northeast. It was not until the reign of King Srong btsan sgam po, who assumed the throne after his father gNam ri slon mtshan died of poisoning, that the Yar lung state began to expand beyond central Tibet. He subjugated all dissenting forces including the Sum pa and their allies who had revolted. According to the *Old Tibet Chronicle*, King Srong bstan sgam po formed a marriage alliance with the powerful Zhang zhung kingdom by giving his sister Sad mar kar to King Lig myi rhya (also: Lig mig rgya). Resorting to treachery, Sad mar kar led her husband into an ambush, leaving Srong btsan sgam po master of the Byang thang. It is worth noting that the Chinese called Zhang zhung Yang t'ung. See Beckwith 1987, pp. 13,14,16; Beckwith 1984, p. 221. *mNga' ris rgyal rabs* states that the Yar lung King gNam ri srong btsan conquered Zhang zhung which was ruled by King gNya' shur rgyal po. The earliest placement, however, of the conquest of Zhang zhung by sPu rgyal is located in the *lDe'u jo sras chos 'byung*, which states that it transpired in the mid-6th century under King 'Bro gnyen lde'u. See Vitali 1996, pp. 103,221.

6. For an account of the sacred geography and significance of Ti thang spom gsum in the Bon tradition, see *Ti rtse thang lha pom ra bcas kyi mchod bstod*.
7. For a synopsis of the mythology and religious significance of A myes rma chen spom ra, see Buffetrille.
8. The *rGyal po'i bka' thang* contains a legend concerning the development of the Tibetan State and the emergence of the first king in relation to sacred mountains and mythological beings (Tucci 1949: 732; Snellgrove 1957: 129). In this legend, Tibet was originally called the Mountainous Country of the Nine Peaks of Tibet and was possessed by a black ogre, gNod sbyin nag po. Subsequently, the country was called bDud kha rag mgo dgu, and was occupied by the btsan and gnyan, and later by the bdud and srin mo. Tibet was then occupied by the btsan and klu and called Bod, the country of nine parts (gling dgu). Bod was inhabited by a white child who walked upon water. In later times, Tibet was inhabited by the nine Ma sangs brothers, who developed spears, arrows and other weapons. The Ma sangs were followed by the 18 chiliarchies, who wore earrings, rode horses and developed art. The chiliarchies were followed by a line of 12 kings. Finally came the sPu rgyal rgyal po, and the country was called the country of the four divisions (ru bzhi).
9. Active in the field of culture, religion and politics, the Fifth Dalai Lama is one of Tibet's greatest figures. It was during his reign that the temporal power of the dGe lugs pa sect was consolidated and the outlying regions of inner Tibet were brought under the jurisdiction of Lhasa. He built monasteries and renovated old ones, which compensated for the ones destroyed during the struggle against his attempt to unite Tibet. The Fifth Dalai Lama was a prolific writer, composing liturgies, tantras, commentaries on the works of Vasubandhu and a guide to Lhasa, among other works.
10. See *Lha chen rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi srog gtad kyi rjes gnang mu thi la'i phreng ba* (Obligations for the Essence Practice of the Jewelled Rosary of the Excellent God Powerful Blazing Vajra),

number *Ka-24* of the Fifth Dalai Lama's *gSung 'bum dkar chag, gSung nang ma series* (herein referred to as Text *Ka-24*), folio 2r-3r of the 6 folio text. The colophon reads: "This [text] was requested by dGe slong 'Jam dbyangs grags pa. Due to this request I, the monk rDo rje thogs med rtsal (Fifth Dalai Lama), out of pure motivation composed this text to aid many tantric practitioners. It contains abtruse materials from rediscovered texts, supplemented by the transmissions of holy lamas, and was written under the star Gro zhun in the light half of the lunar month in the royal Po ta la palace, and the scribe was the same individual who requested it." (Ces lha chen rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi srog gtad kyi rjes gnang mu thi la'i 'phreng ba 'di ni dge slong 'Jam dbyangs grags pas bskul bas mtshams sbyor rig sngags 'chang ba mang por phan 'dod kyis yid drangs nas gter gzhung du mi gsal ba rnams bla ma dan pa'i phyag len gyis brgyan te za hor gyi bandhe rdo rje thogs med rtsal gyis gro zhun zla ba'i dkar cha'i rgyal ba gsum pa la pho brang po ta lar sbyar ba'i yi ge pa'ng bskul ba po nyid do). For a similar account of the subjugation of gNyan chen thang lha based on the *Padma bka' thang*, see sTag lung rTse sprul, p. 14; sLe lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje, pp. 135,136.

11. For a translation of a similar account based on the *Padma bka' thang*, see Tarthang Tulku 1978, pp. 371,372.
12. A similar tale is found in the *Padma thang yig* in reference to a white yak as big as a mountain, an emanation of the mountain Yar lha sham po who appeared to Gu ru rin po che. Gu ru rin po che seized and bound the white yak and administered an oath to him. See Paul, p. 185. The father of Ru las skyes, a progenitor of the blon chen (great ministers) of the Yar lung was the white yak emanation of Yar lha sham po, the ancestral mountain spirit of the Yar lung dynasty (Haarh: 147-149). The white yak of gNyan chen thang lha serves a parallel role for King Khri srong lde btsan.
13. *gNyan chen thang lha'i bskong* so is a manuscript obtained by Bya do rin po che during his visit to Tibet in 1986. It amounts to no more than three folios and is probably part of a larger text of offerings to mountain deities. Its iconographic and liturgical structure is very similar to those of the Fifth Dalai Lama and ostensibly belongs to earlier dGe lugs pa works.
14. According to the *gTer ston rnam thar*, Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phrul (standard dates 1337-1409) was considered to be active in the 11th century. See Kvaerne 1973, pp. 23,27.
15. In the first lineage are sNgags 'chang rdo rje 'chang rnam gnyis (Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje and Byang bdag bkra shis stobs rgyal), Tshad ldan bla ma rnam gnyis (Grub chen chos dbyings rang grol and mGon ston dpal 'byor lhun grub), Drin can sangs rgyas dpal bzang, Chos rgyal bsod nams and his disciple, Kun mkhyen mkhyen brtse'i dbang phyug, 'Phyags mchog byams pa skal bzang, rDo rje 'chang dbang phyug rab brtan and Khyab bdag mgon po bsod nams mchog ldan. In the second branch are rDor 'chang bsod nams bzang po, mNyam med sa skyal dpal bzang, mKhas grub chos kyi rgyal mtshan, dPal ldan nam mkha' grags pa, rJe kun chog blo gros, Shakya dpal bzang, mTsungs med blo gros dbang po and Nub dgon pa byams pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan. In thet hird branch are Chos rje sangs rgyas dpal ba, Je chos dpal 'byor, Tshungs rin chen gzhon nu, sNag 'chang shakya bzang po, Rig 'dzin legs ldan rdo rje and Rig 'dzin nub dgon and their disciple, bKra shis stobs rgyal, Rig

'dzin ngag gi dbang po and Yul mo gter ston bstan 'dzin nor bu. All three of these branches were transmitted to the tutor of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Zur thams cad ma khyen pa chos dbyings rang grol.

16. The Sa skya pa text under consideration is entitled *Thang lha'i gtor bsngo*. Its colophon reads: "Composed by Byams pa ngag dbang tshul khrims, the teacher of bCo brgyad khri chen gong ma'i yongs 'dzin at 'Phan po Na lan dra." bCo brgyad khri chen gong ma'i yongs 'dzin was the predecessor of the senior Sa skya pa lama, Thub bstan legs bshad rgya mtsho. The text is in manuscript form, and was obtained in 1986 by Bya do rin po che during his visit to Tibet. It is a short manuscript, the equivalent of three or four small folios, made for everyday recitation. It includes a gtor ma offering, meditation on emptiness, offering prayers and a visualization of gNyan chen thang lha's person, palace and retinue, which are very similar to those of the Fifth Dalai Lama.
17. The main part of the *sBa bzhed* (by sBa gsal snang) probably dates to the mid-9th century but has been repeatedly revised into the 14th century. The annotated *rBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* (Stein edition) was written circa 1300. See Sorenson, p. 77.
18. According to some sources, in addition to the dmu, gShen rab mi bo che met stiff resistance from the lha rigs under the command of Ti se, 999,000 srid pa'i sman and the 12 bstan ma (Tucci 1980: 240). The dmu or mu are an ancient class of elemental beings with a semi-divine nature mentioned in at least one Tun-huang manuscript. The clan ancestor of gShen rab mi bo che is said to be a dmu. A number of Zhang zhung deities belong to the dmu/mu, including Mu wer, Mu ting tsa med, Mu tsa len and Mu thur. However, dmu is also the Zhang zhung word for nam mkha' (sky) with the meaning of a paradise or the universe. In combination with other words, mu has many connotations. In the bilingual *mDzod phug*, around 70 words which contain mu or dmu are recorded with their Tibetan equivalents. For an excellent discussion of the term dmu, see Dagkar: Ms-B. The dmu as deities or an ancestral tribe were also known to the 11th century Dardic ruler of Mar yul, rGya Ge sar (Vitali 1996: 519).
19. The cult of mountains is also important in the popular religion of Mongolia. In addition to the sky and earth there are other natural powers called master-spirits (tengri). The tengris of mountains in some parts of Mongolia are so important that together with the earth and sky they form a trinity. The tengris of the Buryats are mainly benevolent. In some areas, uttering the real name of a sacred mountain is taboo and the chopping of trees, hunting, cultivation and the erection of tents in its vicinity is forbidden. See Tartar, pp. 1-5.
20. In Mahayana Buddhism imported from India, the concept of a life-force is of marginal importance. In Mahayana dialectical philosophy, the srog is characterized as a non-permanent phenomena. There are three categories of impermanent phenomena—form, consciousness and non-associated compositional factors. The Buddhist counterpart of the srog is the life faculty (srog gi dbang po/jivitendriya) and is one of the 23 classes of non-associated compositional factors. It is defined as the base of consciousness. Non-associated compositional factors are not associated with the mind or mental factors, but are involved with the development of causes and conditions and with the appearance, maintenance and cessation

of products or phenomena. In Buddhism, therefore, the srog has been relegated to one of many cognitive phenomenological categories. The assimilation of the srog gi dbang po and the indigenous srog are an example of the syncretism that took place between pre-Buddhist traditions and Buddhism. For a discussion of the srog gi dbang po, see Hopkins, pp. 268-270. In Tibetan astrology, the srog pertains to the patterns and conditions in an individual's life as affected by the influence of the heavenly bodies.

21. The three bioenergetic systems are rlung (wind), mkhris pa (bile) and bad kan (phlegm). For a superb introduction to traditional Tibetan medicine, see Dhonden, 1986.
22. The five elements in the Tibetan astrological tradition ('byung rtsis) are water, earth, fire, wood and metal. In the tantric tradition they are ether, air, water, earth and fire, corresponding to the Indian pancha tattva.
23. For a comparison of Asian and North American shamanism and Tibetan religion see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 538-554; Gold 1994.
24. In an early Bon funerary ritual, as recorded in the Tun-huang documents, the recalling of the soul of a deceased person of royal rank entailed the presence of the lha yul bdag (yul lha), the ancestors, the grandmother and numerous friends. See Lalou, pp. 17-19.For a description of the recalling of a soul in a contemporary Bon ritual, see Kvaerne 1985.
25. See Stein, p. 203.
26. The pho lha (god of men) is a white god with white clothing who is believed to reside under the right armpit and acts to safeguard people and their male lineage. The pho lha is a very ancient spirit who long pre-dates the modern religions of Tibet. For a more detailed description of the pho lha, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 327,328; Stein, pp. 222,223.
27. The belief in a three-tiered cosmos was also shared by the ancient Turkic peoples of the 6th to 12th centuries. Although little is known about the religious beliefs of the Turkic peoples some evidence has been uncovered from the Chinese Annals and Orkono-Enisei monuments. The indication is that the Turkic peoples had a concept of three worlds: 1) Tengri, associated with the sky, which ruled over the fate of living beings; 2) Umai, the fertility goddess, who inhabited the middle world, as did the deities of the earth (iduq) and water (yersub); and 3) Erlik Khan, ruler of the lower world. Cults of mountains and ancestor spirits were known. An ancient runic text provides us with a notion of the importance of verticality to the ancient Turkic peoples: "When the sky above was blue and the earth below was dark, the sun of man appeared between them." See Vainshtein, p. 59.
28. There is a curious thog lcags (metallic amulet) design consisting of a Bon-style mchod rten surmounting the head of a ram. The significance of this centuries-old amulet is unclear. A more common thog lcags design features a nor bu resting on the head of a yak. The yak head and sheep head thog lcags allude to the sacred status of these animals. In an ancient grave excavated in La dwags, the head of a sheep and the horn of an ox were found (Francke: 73). In the northern areas of Pakistan (Beloristan), the ibex still forms an important part of the folklore. In the Hunza valley, folk-tales speak of the ibex as the emissary of the celestial realm. The ibex, which inhabit the highest regions, are thought to carry out work assigned

to them by the sky-dwelling fairies (paris) and in certain instances the paris manifest as ibex. The horns of the ibex are said to touch the heavens while their hoofs are planted on the ground, thus linking them with the realm of people and celestial beings, a common folkloric theme. In Lahoul during fertility rites (Go tsi) and sowing rites (Chog tsi khis), images of ibex are sculptured from butter. In Chitral, among the Ko of the Turcko valley, talismanic rings are made from ibex horns, and in the Kalash valleys auspicious drawings of ibex are made at the New Year festival of Chumust to help insure a prosperous year. The ibex is found in far western Tibet and the western Himalaya and trans-Himalaya, indicating that the interrelated cult of the gnyan (argali) was imported from the west of Tibet. The ibex is a common subject of petroglyphs in western Tibet, Beloristan, La dwags and sPi ti, indicating its centrality to the economy and religious beliefs of the ancient inhabitants. For data on the ibex in rock art, see Jettmar and Thewalt; Jettmar 1993; Francfort, Klodzinski, Mascale. For an introduction to some elements of folkloric belief in Hunza, see Stellrecht.

29. For an English rendering of this text, see Karmay 1993, p. 154.
30. The bdud are a semi-divine or demonic class of elemental spirits who are generally black and have a wrathful nature. With the introduction of Buddhism they were merged with the Indian Mara, known by the epithet 'The Evil One'. In Tibetan Buddhist doctrine the bdud are equated with mental afflictions and demonic impulses created by the deluded mind (nang gi bdud). See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 273-277; Tucci 1949, p. 718; Norbu 1995, p. 244 for data on the bdud. The bdud are also implicated in causing livestock diseases (phyugs nad), including a kind of hoof and mouth disease called tod nad by the 'brog pa.
31. There is evidence to support the contention that until the time of the assassination of the eighth king, Gri gum btsan po, and the upheavals in the religious make-up of the Yar lung dynasty that coincided with it, the Tibetan cosmos was divided into two opposing spheres in a tradition associated with royal foundation myths called Yang gsang lugs (Most Secret Tradition). Much of what we know about the yang gsang lugs (also spelled yang bsang lugs) is related to the origin myths of the kings. In this tradition, the first king is traced back to the the'u rang spirits and the female ancestral spirits (mo mtshun), while early Bon attributes the male ancestral spirits (pha mtshun) to the progenitors of the kings. This matriarchal bias is reflected in the matrinymical elements in the names of the first seven kings, and in the matrilineal institution of the zang blon (maternal uncle minister), who was entrusted with the guardianship of the government on behalf of the infant king. In the domain of religion, the srid pa'i goddesses were part of the yang gsang matriarchal system of theogony where the genetrix was more important than the genitor. Yang gsang lugs, then, is mainly characterized by a matriarchal structure in addition to radical dualism. See Haarh, pp. 139,168,225,226,318.

    The Tun-huang manuscripts mention a closed cosmological system, the cosmic womb (rum), which was based on contrary principles called above (ya/yar) and below (yog/yogs), characterized by the primordial dualities of white light and black light, and male and female (Haarh: 313,314). The rum, also called the ga'u (sacred receptacle), was the source of life and

within it life and death circulated; it was the reference for the beginning and end of things (Harrh: 161,313,314).

There are a number of cosmogonies and theogonies that mirror the stringent dualism of the Yang gsang tradition. One of the most graphic of these relates that, in the beginning of the universe, a white and black light manifested (Stein: 246). From the white light, a white mustard seed appeared. From it, a white primordial man was born who gave rise to everything and everyone good. Conversely, from the black light, a black mustard seed appeared. From it, a primordial black man was born, who gave rise to everything and everyone evil. A variation of this cosmogonic theme begins with the god of pure potentiality, Yang dag rgyal po, who emanates a white light and a black light (Tucci 1980: 214,215). These lights respectively beget 'Od zer can (the Radiant One) and Myal ba nag po (Black Grief). Dualism is also communicated in the cosmogonic pair, Phan yab (Beneficent Father) and gNod yab (Evil Father), who originate from white and black eggs respectively (Tucci 1980: 214,215).

In a commentary to the *Srid pa'i mdzod phug*, which is part of the Bon bKa' gyur and the main Bon work on cosmogony, there is an excellent example of the Yang gsang lugs type of duality (Karmay 1975: 191-195). It begins with space personified as Nam mkha' stong ldan phyod gsum, possessor of the lees of the five causes. These are collected by the primeval father, Khri rgyal khug pa, who, by uttering 'ha', sets a wind in motion which grows in intensity and forms a wheel of light. The circulation of this wind produces heat, and leads to the formation of dew. This aggregates and is agitated by the wind creating the world. Also, from the essence of the five causes, a white and black egg are formed which give birth respectively to a cubic egg of light and a pyramidal egg of darkness. From the heart of the egg of light appears Srid pa'i Sangs po 'bum khri rgyal po, the progenitor of the gods and humanity. Med 'bum nag po, who stands in opposition to Khri rgyal khug pa, breaks open the egg of darkness. From the heart of the egg of darkness comes Mun pa zer ldan nag po, the king of the world of nonexistence and the progenitor of the demons. In this cosmogony, Khri rgyal khug pa represents the principle of being and light (ye) and Med 'bum nag po, darkness and non-being (ngam)(Norbu 1995: 274). In each of these creation myths, a schemata of opposing forces and entities characterized by an abiding primordial duality is detectable. The division between good and evil, white and black, existence and non-existence is starkly delineated and maintained, and exhibits a high degree of thematic symmetry.

Among the ancient Scythians of neighboring central Asia we find a similar cosmological duality. The union of Papaeus, the sky god, with his wife Api, the earth goddess, symbolized the unity of the sky and earth which gave life to the world (Pavlinskaya: 34). In Shang mythology dualism is found in the characteristics of the Lord on High who is associated with the sun, sky, life, birds and east, and the Lord Below who is associated with the moon, dragons, watery underworld death and west (Allen: 57-73). In the 4th century B.C.E., Chinese text *Songs of Ch'u (Ch'u Tz'u)*, we find a cosmogony based on an earlier fund of myths that structurally and thematically resemble the cosmogonies of the Yang gsang lugs: from the

formless expanse the primeval element vapor spontaneously emerges as a creative force. It is composed of binary elements (ie. upper and lower spheres, darkness and light, and yin and yang), which through a series of transformations pattern the universe. First, the heavens and celestial bodies appear, followed by a vaulted sky of nine planes and nine gates supported by eight pillars rooted in the ground. See Birrel, p. 27.

32. Inter alia, a panoramic view of Tibetan culture, shows that in the cognitive world of the 'brog pa and other Tibetans, the symbolism of white and black as tantamount to good and evil is pervasive and deeply rooted. For example, in the Imperial period white clay was piled around the tombs of warriors as war sacrifice (San Ren). In the 'brog pa wedding ritual, white symbolizes virtue and purity. When a bride first comes to the tent or house of her new husband, she is traditionally attired in white clothes, a white scarf and white shoes, and rides a white horse (Norbu 1994: 195). When an A pa hor girl is preparing to marry, her father presents her with two rings of conch shell, called mden dung, which she wears in her braid and on the side of her head after her marriage (cf. Norbu 1994: 194). Conch shell (dung) is often an attribute of the armor and helmet of the mountain divinities. In this context it is often translated as referring to the color white, which is only partially correct because it also conveys auspiciousness, happiness and prosperity. White wool, an auspicious material is used to decorate handles of tea pots and sacred shrines. Doors of homes are inlaid with white stones for good luck (cf. San Ren). A similar custom is found among the 'brog pa of gNam ru where door panels of the tent are woven from white yak hair. Conversely, the color black is thought to have inauspicious and evil connotations. For example, nag can refers to an evil person and nag chen a heinous crime or a terrible sinner. Unlike people of central Tibet, the A pa hor rarely wear black clothing. Black animals are thought to be prone to an ill disposition and to be susceptible to possession by evil spirits. For example, the bdud are believed to inhabit such animals. Indigenous deities like the klu and lha are most dangerous in their black forms. Undoubtedly, indigenous beliefs merged with and were reinforced by analogous symbolism in tantric Buddhism, where white is equated with virtue and purity, and black with ferocity and malevolence. For example, in Buddhist doctrine there are the dkar po'i chos bzhi, the four white or virtuous conducts and the nag po'i chos bzhi, the four black or negative conducts. How much of color dualism is an anachronism associated with the Yang gsang lugs or even more ancient traditions and how much of it is derived from tantric philosophy is difficult to determine. However, the stridency and ubiquitousness of the belief in 'brog pa culture leads to the assumption that a significant part of it is atavistic in nature.

33. According to legend, the tradition of the Shes pa bcu gnyis stems back to 12 wise Bon po, each of whom was master of a different field of knowledge, and who were part of the court of King gNya' khri btsan po. See Dunkar Rinpoche 1992, p. 57. An early reference to the 12 wise men is found in a gter ma text discovered in 980 by Khro tshang 'brug lha, the *Byams ma chen mo rtsa ba'i gzungs* (Dagkar: Ms-A).

34. The 'dre dkar sing songs about creation make jokes and sometimes dance with yaks or

lions. In their performances, yaks often represent yul lha. Their humorous yet sacred performances suit the New Year, a time of uncertainty. 'Dre dkar may paint their faces half white and half black and wear a white, triangular mask or a pointed cap, in addition to the hunter's mask. See Stein, p. 18. According to Ma nam shes rab rgyal mtshan, who has studied and played 'dre dkar, their message should be both succinct and evocative. It is to this end that comical and even vulgar language is used. Traditionally 'dre dkar came from 'commoner' families. Their most important tools are a stick and a bowl. In verses sung by the 'dre dkar he calls his stick (dbyugs pa) "my helper when I sing, my horse when I travel, my protector when I sleep, and my ladder when I climb to the sky."

35. For a description of the Buddhist tripartite historical classification of Bon, see Vitali 1996, pp. 100-104; Norbu 1995, pp. 38-42.
36. It is not known with any degree of certainty when pastoralism superseded hunting and gathering on the Byang thang. A date for its inception between 2000 B.C.E. and 1000 B.C.E. is indicated. This period coincides with the evolution of Eurasian stockbreeding into its modern form (Ecsedy 1981: 210,227). It is believed that the sheep was first domesticated in west Asia around 9000 B.C.E. (Ryder, p. 3) and that a more sedentary way of life based on agriculture and the domestication of animals began to appear in China circa 7000 B.C.E. (Chow Ben-Shun: 105-107). By the Aenolithic period in central Asia, around the end of the third millennium B.C.E., among the Afanasyevskaya culture, the domestication of animals was already known (Gryaznov: 46-51). In east Tibet, from the mKhar ro site, there is some inconclusive archaeological evidence for the domestication of cattle animals from the Neolithic period (2000B.C.E.). See Chayet, p. 46; Appendix Two.
37. For an overview of the archaeological evidence of the Stone Age in Tibet including the Byang thang, see Appendix Three.
38. Precisely which kinds of hunting are permissible and which are not is a debatable subject among the 'brog pa. Many say that the killing of any juvenile animals will certainly invite trouble from gNyan chen thang lha, as will hunting in especially sacred areas.
39. See *Padma dbang gi gter sung cho. rDo rje 'bar ba'i gsol mchod gzhugs*, fol. 7r.
40. The 'go ba'i lha lnga are the yul lha, dgra lha, pho lha, mo lha and srog lha, and alternatively dgra lha, pho lha, mo lha, zang lha and srog lha. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 264-266; Stein, pp. 222-223.
41. This manuscript is entitled *sLob dpon padma mdzad pa'i spang bstod snang srid dgra lha dgyes pa'i gsol mchod lha'i klu dbyangs zhes*. Its rediscoverer is not known. The text contains an invocation to the dgra lha and prayers for the preparation of gtor ma. It consists of 18 folios. A copy of this manuscript was kindly made available by Ven. Nyi ma Senge, the head lama of sPu in Khu nu.
42. There are, however, some Tibetans who maintain that a gzhi bdag is the more important, and larger, variety of yul lha.
43. Under the Communist regime, the Tibet Autonomous Region (Inner Tibet) has been partitioned into six prefectures which in turn are divided into around 75 counties.

44. According to the *'Dzam gling rgyas bshad*, the 'brog pa of the eastern and central Byang thang (Nag tshang, gNam ru, Nag chu and Yangs pa can) formed the Byang rigs sde bzhi (The Four Communities of Northern Tribes)(Wylie: 88). In the traditional political geography of the Byang thang, each rdzong (district) was divided into a number of camps, headed by a chieftain (dpon po) if the camp was large and an elder (rgan po) if it was a small camp or sub-camp. According to oral sources the number of camps in each of the rdzong were as follows: A mdo—eight; gNam ru—13; Nag tshang—six; Bar tha—nine; lha ri—one; Sog—one; 'Bri ru—one; sBra chen—one and; in mNga' ris, in far western Tibet, one camp each in Ru thog, rTsa mda', sGar, dGe rgyas, sGer rtse and Tsog chu. The traditional political geography of the Byang thang served as a basis for the political geography of the Communist period, with many borders remaining roughly the same. Generally, the rdzong correspond to Chinese counties and camps (tsho pa) to Chinese townships.
45. A microcosm of territorial independence and interdependence is found in the village cult of the klu. In nearly all Tibetan villages there is a shrine (klu khang) and often a large tree dedicated to the village klu who protects the local water supply as well as mediating in the weather. In the storeroom of many homes there is a sacred stone (klu rdo) and often a sacred vessel (klu bum) in which the family's personal klu is enshrined and entreated. Each family has its own klu. The field are hosts to a plethora of klu which are appeased by heaping white stones (klu rdo) in the middle of them. These klu belong to all different orders and persuasions and can be either independent of or subservient to the village klu. The principle of territorial interdependence operates in the village klu while the family klu and some of the field klu are indicative of territorial independence.
46. See *gNyan chen thang lha'i 'phrin las bdud rtsi'i chu rgyun bzhugs so* (The Current of the River of Nectar of the Activities of gNyan chen thang lha) of the Fifth Dalai Lama's *gsung bumd kar chag, gsung nang ma* series, number Nga-53 (hereafter referred to as Text *Nga-53*), fol.4v. The colophon reads: "Senge rGya mtsho requested Za hor (clan name of the Fifth Dalai Lama) to write this scripture. The woodblock maker is Ngag dbang byams pa of Gangs dkar dkar brag pa." For a similar description, which the author says is from the *Padma bka' thang*, see sTaglung rTse sprul, p. 15.
47. *'Dzam gling spyi bsangs*, a rare text which is attributed to Gu ru rin po che, was obtained in 1986 by Bya do rin po che during his visit to Tibet. The copy under consideration is in manuscript form and consists of four folios. Unfortunately, the gter ston who rediscovered it is not listed.
48. See *Ti se pom ra thang lha gyi bsang bskong*, folios 5v, 6r. This manuscript was composed by Dran pa nam mkha', and the sections on Pom ra and Thang lha were discovered by rMa lha rgod thog pa at Sham po gangs and received by Bru nyi ma, while the section on Ti se was discovered by dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal at bZang bzang lha brag. It was kindly made available to me by Bya dur sod nams bzang po, who managed to bring it out of Tibet in 1959. It had been kept in his family chapel for generations. Variations of this text include *Ti rtse thang lha pom ra btsas kyi mchod bstod* (Minor Bon po Ritual Texts, nos. 291-302) and *Ti pom*

thang gsum gyi mchod bskang (Bskạng 'bum, vol. II, nos. 311-318). As these incense texts were copied and recopied over the centuries, minor variations in content naturally developed.

49. A fine painted image of gNyan chen thang lha and Nam mtsho is located in an upper level chapel in the 'du khang of Zhab bstan dgon pa in Nag chu city.
50. The author's name is given on folio 11v. From folio 11r to 14v there is a shorter gNyan chen thang lha text simply called bsdụs pa (short form). In the colophon (14v), no author is given and it can be assumed that it was also written by Ngag dbang bkra shis dpal grub. The colophon reads: "gZhal yas dam can sogs sngon gyi yig cha khung thub las byang ba rnams byon. Myang dang tshul rdo rjed [sic rje] ldem gyis gter kha rnams las 'byung." It informs us that the text is in part derived from ancient sources and in part from hidden texts. rDo jre ldem is evidently a reference to the great rNying ma gter ston Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem phru. Beginning on folio 14v and continuing to the end of the manuscript (fol. 20) is an untitled text compiled by Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma, the seventh in the sTag lung rMa sprul lineage (18th or 19th century). This text with its archaic language and deities undoubtedly was borrowed from early sources. It seems likely that some of its verses and deities were derived from the early Bon tradition. Unfortunately, this rare manuscript, which is invaluable for the study of the archaic gNyan chen thang lha, is marred with numerous spelling and grammatical errors. This text will hereforth be referred to as the sTag lung primary text. The sTag lung havẹ a fourth text devoted to gNyan chen thang lha which is also written by Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma, and is entitled *Thang lha'i bsangs mchos [sic mchod] bsdus pa*. This text comprises one folio and is written for everyday recitation. The four gNyan chen thang lha texts enumerated above are part of the Chos skyong cycle of the sTag lung pa. This cycle of religious protectors is headed by the deity dGe bsnyen nag po sprang btsan who is usually depicted with his two acolytes, g.Ya dmar and bDud btsan. In the hierarchy of protectors, gNyan chen thang lha is inferior to dGe bsnyen nag po sprag btsan but superior to his acolytes. The texts enumerated above, which are all in manuscript form, were generously made available by sTag lung rMa sprul bsTan 'dzin kun bzang 'jigs med, who also provided information on their place and significance in the sTag lung sub-sect.
51. References for 'Dam shod snar mo include Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 206, and *dPal phur nag po'i gter bdag drug gi bskul ba zhes bya ba bzhugs*, which is part of the Bon Phur ba cycle.
52. Dred mo is either the brown bear of the Tibetan plateau or the yeti. Whichever it is, the implication is that it is both a real animal and a mythical creature.
53. In the old chronicles and legends of Buryat, the dead were honored and buried at mountain sites. In other regions of Mongolia, shamans and elders were buried at mountains and each tribe probably had its own mountain cult. Among the Buryat there is also evidence that the mountain spirits were identified with the ancestors. For example, shamans make representations of the mountain spirits which presumably are also representations of the shaman ancestors. SeeTatar, pp. 5-7.
54. This synopsis of the *Can lnga* myths was extracted from Samten Karmay's work. See Karmay 1994a, pp. 408-430.
55. The the'u brang or the'u rang are diminutive forms of the, a semi-divine class of beings,

who are supposed to be the son of sPu yul mo gung rgyal and the ancestors of the kings. They are also considered to have a malevolent nature, causing sickness and bad weather. See Tucci 1949, pp. 718,719; Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 282,283.

56. *Lha rgod drag dar* is an unpublished manuscript attributed to sTong rgyung mthu chen and discovered by three Buddhist gter ston, the Ben de mi gsum. This text was kindly made available by sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag.
57. The mountain gTsang lha phu dar is located near the settlement of sTag rtse, which is not far from the gTsang po river in the county of Sa dga'. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, there is a tradition that states this mountain used to form the boundary between Zhang zhung and sPu rgyal. There is also a tradition which attributes the name of the gTsang province to gTsang lha phu dar.
58. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, the mgur lha were royal divinities involved in protecting the dynasty. The lists of these mountain deities vary but they share the common denominator of circumscribing the territory of the pre-Imperial Yar lung dynasty.
59. For a description of the legend of the coupling of the divine ape with the rock ogress, see Turnbull and Norbu, pp. 28,29; Taylor and Yuthok pp. 75-80.
60. For a portrayal of the supine demoness legend, see Dowman 1988, pp. 284-287; Taylor and Yuthok, pp. 163-188.
61. In the rNying ma-influenced dbus gter tradition, one of the nine-fold classifications of Bon is the Bya ba gtsang spyod ye bon theg pa (the Bon Way of the Inviolable Primordial Accomplishment)(Norbu 1995: 236,237). Though the classification of Bon alluded to above does not contain many of the pre-Buddhist ritual traditions, nor the word for bird (Norbu 1995: 237), in the popular imagination of Tibetans bya bon (bon of the bird) invokes memories of ancient religious practices. The bird and birdlike nature of the early kings indicates that a bird was the totem or clan name of the king and royal family (Haarh: 210,211) This ancestor of the Yar lung dynasty might have been known as Bya khri and a text identifies lower Yar lung as the seat of the bird clan (Haarh: 210,211). The ninth king, sPu lde gung rgyal, was also called Bya khri bstan po, which conveys some idea of the importance of birds in early Tibetan royal symbolism. In the *Ya ngal gdung rabs* it mentions that the sku gshen (royal priest) of King gNya' khri btsan po wore the feathers of eagles, the king of birds, on top of his head, and a golden bya ru (bird horns) with turquoise feathers on his head (Vitali 1996: 162).

    In the King Ge sar epic, birds play a crucial role. For example, in the story of the marriage of Lha mo 'brug mo to the hero of the epic, birds are integral to the adventure which unfolds (Francke 1905: 122-129). Lha mo 'brug mo's parents proclaim that they will only permit their daughter to marry the man who can produce the wing of a Nyi ma khyung rung bird. Ge sar assumes the form of a dove in order to enter the abode of Bya ma dkar po. He is informed by Bya ma dkar po that the Nyi ma khyung rung bird lives in a place between the sun and the moon which is watched over by the bird, So mig dar. Nyi ma khyung rung is said to have the power to destroy the world of humans, but eventually Ge sar is able to kill both it and Sog mig dar. Ge sar then recovers the treasures from its stomach and cuts

off one of its wings, and returns triumphantly to the country of gLing. In the tale of the capture of Lha mo 'brug mo by the King of Hor (Francke 1905: 243-249), two raven messengers are dispatched to find the King of Hor a suitable bride. They visit various countries with no luck until they come to gLing and espy the beautiful Bru gu ma. In recitations of the epic, the bla and birds are closely connected and together form a popular theme. For example, the villain—the King of Hor, Seng lcam, has a black soul bird (bla bya nag) which he sends to steal the turquoise ancestral head ornament that Lha mo 'brug mo wears. The theft is successful and many adventures transpire before it is recovered with the help of Lha mo 'brug mo's white soul bird (bla bya dkar).

Ge sar's protecting gods and his siblings take the form of white eagle, crow, bird girl and three iron hawks, among other animals (Stein: 228,229). A provocative role of the bird is found in a legend about the chief propagator of Buddhism in Sikhim, Lha btsun chen po, encountering the mountain Gangs chen mdzod lnga in the form of the king the geese (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 217). In the ancient Tibetan narrative tradition (sgrung) there was a cycle of moralistic stories called "Allegories of Birds and Fables of Little Birds" (Bya dpe bye'u'i sgrung), which are still popular today (Norbu 1995: 16,17). It seems likely that g.Yu bya gshog gcig, as the genetrix of one of Tibet's mightiest mountain deities, had a relationship with some or all of these symbolic elements of birds. This symbolism can be summed up as follows: 1) a type of Bon; 2) a clan symbol of the Yar lung dynasty; 3) powerful soul entities; 4) a kind of moral force; 5) a type of guardian; 6) manifestation of sacred mountains; 7) skilful messengers; and 8) indicative of great power, including destructive power.

An overview of the general significance of birds in Tibetan culture is not complete without mentioning their cosmological symbolism. A nuptial song recorded from western Tibet speaks ofa world tree with six branches and six points (rtse mo)(Tucci 1949: 711-713). On each branchof this tree is a bird and corresponding egg, which are guardians of the six cardinaldirections. These birds and eggs are: 1) khyung—golden egg; 2) vulture—turquoise, egg; 3)white-headed vulture—conch egg; 4) eagle—silver egg; 5) white grouse—coral egg; and 6) whitefalcon—iron egg. It is worth noting that the first bird in the list is a popular deity in the region and that the latter five are found throughout the Byang thang. In the epic, there is a cosmogony involving two primordial birds which have 18 eggs in their nest, consisting of six white eggs, six yellow eggs and six blue eggs (Stein: 195). These eggs preserve the fundamental cosmological schema, and it is from the middle yellow eggs that humans originate.

The symbolism of the bird is very important to the religion and cosmogony of many peoples in north and central Asia (cf.Waida: 287-289). The eagle is sometimes considered the creator of the world or a seminal cultural hero, who provides knowledge, laws, cultural innovations, codes of social conduct and social institutions (Waida: 288). For example, an ancient Mongolian myth relates how an eagle with golden wings gave Genghiz Khan the basic laws and the mandate to rule (Waida: 285). Also among the Buryats there is a genealogical legend of a swan ancestor (Okladnikov: 123-124). In shamanist tribes of north Asia, birds are vehicles of spiritual flight, objects of divination and powerful totemic symbols.

The general significance of birds in Inner Asia is recounted in the Tibetan cultural world. In ancient China, the Shang rulers had a totemic relationship with sun birds and in the origin myths of the Shang, the ancestor of the dynasty is a blackbird (Allen: 19-56). Also in China, in the 4th century B.C.E. *Chronicle of Tso* it records various bird clans that controlled astronomical phenomena and temporal affairs (Birrel: 267,268).

62. Turquoise is worn as jewelry and ornamentation throughout Tibet and is used frequently to describe the color of indigenous deities, and their mounts and attributes. It is the most celebrated bla gnas and has the connotations of prosperity, long life, good fortune, fertility and happiness. The heaven of Tara is called g.Yu lo bkod pa'i zhing khams and many of the most sacred lakes contain the word turquoise in them and are known as g.yu mtsho. Furthermore, turquoise highly regarded for its detoxifying properties is a valuable ingredient in the most precious traditional medicines. This material is also commonly used to decorate sacred images.
63. The Bon theogony of gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho is found in the last three folios of a nine folio text entitled *dBal phur nag po'i gter bdag drug gi bskul ba zhes*, which includes six Bon protective deities. It is part of the *Phur ba'i sgrub skor* and gNyan chen thang lha, along with the other deities of this cycle, is worshipped in conjunction with Phur ba. This constitutes the most common Bon context for the worship of gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho. The *dBal phur nag po'i gter bdag drug gi bskul ba zhes* is attributed to the Zhang zhung luminaries sTong rgyung mthu chen and Pha ba khri snya rgyal chung, making it—at least by legendary associations—among the oldest of texts devoted to gNyan chen thang lha. It is found in a collection of Phur ba texts in a lithographic edition published circa 1950 by Khyung sprul 'jigs med nam mkha'i rdo rje (1897-1956), pp. 431-440. It is believed that the text under consideration, like all but the late adjunct texts of the Phur ba cycle, was concealed by rJe mu thur btsan po and Khyung po gyer zla med in sPa gro phug gcal in Bhutan in the 8th century and rediscovered by the gter ston Khu tsha zla 'od (b. 1024) in sPa gro phug gcal (Karmay 1977: 51).
64. The term dbyings most simply means space, with the connotation of a primordial ground. dByings is a changeless, non-concrete instrument which is the distinguishing feature of the natural and uncontrived state of the mind and objects. Specifically, in Bon cosmogony it denotes a void-like state from which the primordial deities are manifested. It should not be confused with the Mahayana concept of emptiness (stong pa nyid/shunyata) which is a dialectical concept used to establish that all products, mental and physical, are devoid of inherent existence, and therefore posits the insubstantiality of phenomena. The main contrast, then, between dbyings and stong pa nyid is that the former is an objectified phenomenon, while the latter has no existence of its own. A similarity is found between the unitary primordium of the dbyings and a Chinese cosmogony recorded in a recently discovered 4th century B.C.E. text, the *Tao yuan*, which states that before creation everything was a wet, dark, empty space (Birrel:25,28).
65. According to Professor Namkhai Norbu, the word skos literally means "the person entrusted"

and has the connotation of "to control the order of existence". See Norbu 1995, pp. 147,241.

66. Thog lcags literally means thunder iron or first metal. These are a heterogeneous class of metallic amulets and fetishes highly prized in Tibet for their magical qualities. Believed to be self-formed, they come in a wide range of designs. Many of them are pre-Buddhist and some originate from the Bronze Age. They are a fairly common attribute of pre-Buddhist deities. For more information see Tucci 1973; Ronge; Bellezza 1994.
67. Dzwo are magical weapons which can be thrown at enemies like a bomb. See Norbu 1995, pp. 214-215.
68. The island of Nang do (Inner island) is not explicitly mentioned by name in the text but, according to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, there is no doubt that this famous island is the one alluded to.
69. According to Bon legend, these kings wore horns on their heads made of gold, silver, crystal, iron, and conch as a proud sign of their royal perogative. Some Bon po claim the very name Zhang zhung is derived from bya khyung, which bears some phonetical similarity. Alternatively, it is theorized that zhung means khyung and zhang comes from the Tibetan word for maternal uncle (zhang) and was added later as a sign of respect when the royal families of Yar lung and Zhang zhung intermarried (Norbu 1995: xvi).

According to sTag lung rTse sprul thub bstan rgyal mtshan, there are legends that recount the presence of two kinds of khyung who existed in ancient times but are now extinct. One was a gigantic bird which lived on mountain tops and exercised a protective function over human beings and their concerns. The other species was much smaller, had horns, and fed on human flesh. More than a mere eater of carrion, this latter species of khyung was evidently involved in the afterlife experiences of the early Bon Tibetans. It is now supposed to live in the mythical kingdom of Sham bha la.

The khyung is also one of the four dgra lha of the prayer flag or prayer card (rlung rta), who have a protective and fortune-bestowing function. In the Bon of Deities, the Lore of Protection (mgon shes lha bon), which is part of the 'Twelve Lores', there are three groups of dgra lha (Norbu 1995: 54), one of which descended from Khyung chen ral chen (Great Long-Maned Khyung). These dgra lha, known as the Manifestation of Primordial Existence (Ye srid 'phrul gyi sgra lha), are said to have manifested from various parts of Khyung chen ral chen's body (Norbu 1995: 70). Included in a group of dgra lha is sKyes bu phrag lha, depicted as a white man riding a khyung, who is the perpetual guardian of individuals (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 330,332). The text *dGra lha dpangs stod* explains the origin and importance of nine dgra lha, which have nine kinds of armor including a helmet with the horns of a khyung (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 356,357). According to myth, the yul lha of the village of sPu in Khu nu, dGra lha, originally came in the form of a giant khyung which covered the entire village.

The khyung occupies a central place in the cosmology of both Bon and Buddhism. A common tale set on the summit of the world axis mountain, Ri rab lhun po (Mount Sumeru), called the Holy Place of the Thirty-three Lha, mentions a wish-fulfiling tree named dPag bsam ljon shing with the protector of the world, a khyung, perched at the top. This khyung,

a worldly protector ('jig rten pa'i srung ma), is considered all-powerful and supremely beautiful. The apotropaic function of the khyung can be found in the epic, where on top of Mount Sumeru there is the nest of the White Conch Female Khyung (Dung khyung dkar mo), a tutelary god who protects the hero's helmet (Stein: 209). The symbol of the khyung residing on top of the world is preserved in its customary place at the very top of the aureole, surrounding many deities in Bon and Buddhism. In this way, the khyung functions as a ubiquitous guardian.

The khyung is a vibrant symbol of the philosophical view of assimilated Bon and its didactic traditions. For example, the text *lTa ba khyung chen g.yung drung gsang ba'i rgyud* (g.Yung drung Doctrine of the Secret Lineage of the Great Khyung) is concerned with a dialectical understanding of emptiness (stong pa nyid). The khyung is also a tutelary deity (yi dam) of the Bon po—known generally as a wisdom (ye shes) khyung—and is ultimately an emanation of gShen rab mi bo che. The yi dam khyung includes black, white and other varieties. Their sadhanas are found in the tantric text *Khyung dmar sgrub pa* attributed to bLo gros thogs med. The varieties of yi dam khyung are said to be efficacious in curing diseases caused by the klu, including leprosy (mdzes) and diseases specifically related to the Degenerate Age (bSkal pa ngan po). This is because they possess innate power over the klu, and therefore are seen as antidotes to the pathogenic propensities of the klu. In Tibet, communities sponsor Bon po priests to recite the khyung yi dam rituals in the belief that it will prevent damage to crops caused by hail. The khyung is associated with the fire element, the most volatile of the five elements (Norbu 1995: xvi), and with the sky and space. In Buddhist tantra, the khyung cures diseases like cancer caused by the klu through the sacred bird's mastery of the fire element (cf. Dowman 1994: 68-70). In the Buddhist sadhana *sGrub thabs kun btus,* five types of khyung belonging to the five tantric families and eliminate the five poisons associated with klu (Wayman: 63-78). The khyung is also represented in one of the sets of theriomorphic deities of the Bon Mother Tantra (Ma rgyud), which are centered around Mount Kailas, the five rTa sgo ma pang mkha' 'gro khyung gdong.

As a result of its seminal position in Tibetan culture, the khyung is an integral part of the iconography and symbolism of many kinds of deities. In the list that follows, the emphasis is on the diverse contexts of the khyung in the Tibetan pantheon. For example, five khyung are found in the entourage of Bon yi dam such as Me ri and dBal chen ge khod (Khyung chen rigs lnga) above his head (Kvaerne 1995: 98,100,101). The khyung supports the throne of the Bon god, the King of Existence (Srid pa'i rgyal po), Sangs po 'bum khri. In the retinue of the four-handed Mahakala of wisdom (Ye shes mgon po phyag bzhi pa), are eight naked red animal-headed dakinis including one with a khyung's head. Mahakala Las mgon bya rog gdong can has the face of a raven with a meteoric beak, three eyes and a khyung emerging from its head (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 46,48,49,471). The Lord of the Tent (Gur mgon) is accompanied by a black man, black dog, black jackal, black bird and, overhead, by his messenger, a khyung; and in another form he has the wings of a khyung (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 50,51). The *Rin 'byung* text refers to 12 khyung, each with a different attribute said to reside

on different parts of Vajrapani's body (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 257,258). Variably, Vajrapani himself can manifest as a khyung, whose purpose according to legend is to protect the klu from the predations of the khyung (Newark Museum, vol.III: 42). The khyung also features as the mount of various bstan ma goddesses in different sadhanas, such as Kha rag khyung btsun, rKong btsun de mo and rDo rje dpal gyi yum (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 188,189). One of the members of the Dregs pa (Dregs pa (the Arrogant One), which is usually used as a generic term for gods and goddesses of lower rank, includes many pre-Buddhist deities. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 253-318.) includes Khyung sngon 'byung po 'dur Ed can, described as having a sky-blue body, three fiery eyes, beak, horns, claws and a meteoric beak (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 256). The yaksa, gNod sbyin dmar nag, rides a red khyung of copper, and the *Vaidurya dkar po* there is a khyung sa bdag mentioned called gNam gyi bya khyung heng phan (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 258,281).

An overview of the khyung in the religion and mythology of Tibet would be incomplete without a description of its function as an ancestral deity. The most famous of these legends concern the clans of Khyung po in northwestern Khams. The Primordial Buddha (Samantabhadra) manifested as a miraculous khyung and descended from his abode in space to the earth. He first landed on the gzhi bdag of sTeng chen, Pad ni ri bkra, a large mountain which started crumbling under the great force of the bird. The khyung was compelled to move on and he flew to Pa ta po le 'go', which, while smaller than the former mountain, supported him. The khyung then travelled to the rTse drug monastery area, known at that time as Zhang zhung Kha yug gi yul, where he deposited three eggs. These three eggs were white, black and yellow in color and, when they hatched, three brothers of corresponding colors appeared. The yellow brother was the patriarch of the Ser ru clan and settled in Ser tsha; the white brother became the patriarch of the dKar rus clan and settled in dKar ru; and the black brother became the patriarch of the Nag rus clan and settled in Nag ru. Over the course of time, many religious luminaries were born to these clans. To this day, Khyung po is traditionally divided into three subprovinces of the same names.

A khyung clan progenitor is found in rGya rong in Khams province, which traditionally was divided into 18 principalities. One of these 18 principalities was ruled over by the Khro skyabs rgyal clan, whose ancestors can be traced back to a multicolored khyung. There is also the khyung, Pho lha chen po, a chos skyong and ancestral deity residing on the mountain Khyung dung gangs who is mentioned in the *Chronicles of the Rulers of Sikhim* and is worshipped by spirit-mediums and those wishing to acquire great strength (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 236-237).

The khyung is also related to the ancient rDzogs chen (Great Perfection) tradition, among the highest and most profound of Bon and Buddhist teachings. The khyung is used as a metaphor to express the character and outlook of these teachings. The khyung is the ideal symbol of the rDzogs chen philosophy because its residence at the pinnacle of the world and sovereignty over all airborne creatures conveys the lofty and superior qualities of rDzogs chen. Also, as a world protector, the khyung emphasizes the ubiquitous scope and reach of

the rDzogs chen doctrine. As we saw in the Bon theogony, the ultimate origin of gNyan chen thang lha and his khyung emanation is the dbyings of which they are unsullied representations.

In an ancient Bon myth, the khyung spontaneously manifested from an egg as a fully mature being, a symbol of the ever accessible nature of the rDzogs chen view (Dowman 1994: 68-70). The flight of the khyung is used as a model by the practitioner to understand the instinctual, natural and effortless character of the teachings (Dowman 1994: 68-70). Also, in the Mahayana tradition, the image of the synchronous movement of the khyung's wings demonstrates the unitary nature of dualism and the simultaneous emergence of skilful means and perfect insight (Dowman 1994: 68-70). The Bon rDzogs chen tradition also employs a similar metaphor to illustrate that dualistic thought is dispelled through non-discriminating insight. In this metaphor the khyung appears in the sky, smoothly cutting through the three spheres of existence, subduing all creatures with claws (Snellgrove 1967: 249). The symbolic import of the khyung can be summed up as follows: 1) clan progenitor; 2) Bon and Buddhist protector of people and religion; 3) a mount of various deities and in the retinue of various deities; 4) a dgra lha, dregs pa, sa bdag or mountain deity; 5) Bon yi dam; 6) Bon Ma rgyud dakini; 7) Bon didactic emblem; 8) associated with death and the after-life experience; 9) a metaphor for rDzogs chen teachings; and 10) related to the etymology of the name Zhang zhung.

70. For a superb overview of the qualities and practices of the bodhisattva, see H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama 1981; also, Batchelor; Snellgrove 1987, pp. 58-79.
71. See Text *Ka-23*, fol. 4r; Text *Nga-53*, fol. 12v; sTag lung rTse sprul, p. 14.
72. For an iconography of Akashagarbha, see Getty, pp. 101,102.
73. This verse of the *Prajnaparamita (Sher phyin)* taken from the prayers compiled for the teachings of the H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, 1994 as compiled by the Tushita Retreat Center.
74. The form realm (gzugs khams) is one of three realms of Buddhism (khams gsum), the other two being the formless realm (gzugs med pa'i khams) and the desire realm ('dod pa'i khams). The form realm is divided into 17 parts and the six deities of gNyan chen thang lha come from the first of these, which is called tshangs ris.
75. Found in the text entitled *Lha chen thang lha gnyan po sgrub cing mchod pa'i phrin las kyi chog tshang pa'i lha'i rnga chen bya ba bzhugs so* (part of the rNying ma pa Rin chen gter mdzod), rediscovered by Rig 'dzin rgod ldem, Padma ngag dbang blo gros mtha' yas and 'Drin chog ta''i si tu padma'i ljog ldan. See folios 20v,21r.
76. Ging belong to the retinue of rDo rje legs pa, Tshangs pa and mGon po but are famously associated with the priests in the scapegoat ceremony (glud 'gong) once held in Lhasa at Lo gsar (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 278,280,508-511). The leader of the ging, Srog bdag tshangs pa, seems to be identical with Tshangs pa but is described as wearing a cloak of vulture feathers, a chopper and snare in his hands, and is mounted on a white lion—an appearance quite different from the ordinary Tshangs pa (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 278). Dam can shel ging dkar po, who is occasionally given the name Pe har, is described as a human figure wearing a red

lioness skin coat and a gong lag made from the skin of a blue lioness (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 96,120). In the same description, he wears a golden scarf wrapped around his head, a snake girdle and boots of crystal. It is not known why the Buddhists identified this rather obscure deity with gNyan chen thang lha. No overt recognition in the Bon tradition of Shel ging dkar po being associated with gNyan chen thang lha has yet been found, but this does not preclude him from the role of a resident deity of the mountain in ancient times.

77. Nyi pang sad, the protector of the Zhang zhung snyan brgyud, dwells on the summit of Mount Sumeru and thus has come to be identified with Gangs ti se. He is considered the king of the sgra bla (dgra lha) and btsan but subordinate to the Bon yi dam, dBal chen ge khod. Nyi pang sad and his female counterpart, sMan ku ma ra tsa, who rides a white yak and is a form of gNam sman gnam phyi gung rgyal, were subdued by the 8th century lama sNang bzher lod po. For a description of Nyi pang sad see Kvaerne 1995, pp. 109,110. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, sNang bzher lod po (a member of the Gu rub clan) hailed from gShen gyer, an area immediately west of gNyan chen thang lha. In the Lahoul Spiti and Kinnaur districts of the western Himalaya, sad deities inhabit mountains and other physical features. Nyi pang sad, the premier sad (Zhang zhung equivalent of lha), has an appearance very similar to gNyan chen thang lha, and his female companion is a form of gNam sman gnam phyi gung rgyal, a deity very closely associated with gNam mtsho.
78. The dri za are present in some of the official Buddhist lists of elemental deities (lha srin sde brgyad) (Norbu 1995: 252) and are the equivalent of the Indian gandharvas, a class of celestial musicians. In the Indian tradition, Pancasikha is the king of the gandharvas. The gandharvas are also mentioned in the Matsya Purana, as one of the more gentle groups of aboriginal peoples the Aryans came in contact with in northwestern India. For an excellent overview of the ancient tribes of the Himalaya based on Sanskritic literature, see Pachani. In the *kLu 'bum* and the *Chronicle of the Fifth Dalai Lama*, Dri za zur phud lnga pa is referred to as the king of the klu (klu'i rgyal po) (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 100,129). In sTag lung rtse sprul's account of the subjugation of gNyan chen thang lha by Gu ru rin po che, derived from the *Padma bka' thang*, the Vajrayana master exclaims that the white serpent emanation, Po ne le thod dkar, is both Dri za rgyal po zur phud lnga pa and Klu'i rgyal po (sTag lung rtse sprul: 14). This shows that the oneness of the king of the klu and the king of the dri za is most definitely linked through gNyan chen thang lha. Dri za zur phud lnga pa is a member of the sku lnga group of protectors led by Pe har (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 130). His main attribute is the zur phud, either a kind of ornament worn on top of the head or a style of wearing the hair tightly bound; in his case, there are five of them. He is described (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 208) as wearing a white silk cloak, a conch hat and is mounted on a flying white horse with a turquoise mane and eyes like gzi. In his right hand he holds a cane stick, and in his left hand a short lance with a silk banner attached to it. His lha khor consists of 360 thang lha deities and an additional 300 bdud, btsan and sman.
79. With the introduction of Buddhism, Vishnu, who is of Indian origin, came to be accepted

into the Tibetan pantheon. His consort is Khyab 'jug chung ma (Laksmi), who is also known as Pad ma can and dPal mo and his golden eagle mount is called Dug 'joms ldan. Among the many epithets for Vishnu are sTeng gi dbang po, Thig le drug pa 'gro pa'i tog, dPal gyi bdag, Gom gsum gnan dang stobs ldan bsal, mKha' lding rgyal mtshan 'khor lo phyag, and Me tog lho ba mkhar pa'i dgrá (Das: 157,550). Vishnu has one face with a calm expression, four arms and two legs; and he wears a five-leafed crown, earrings, a necklace, armlets, bracelets, wristlets, two garlands, a wide belt and two wraps (Bunce: 611). In his principal hands is a conch and wheel, and in his two other hands he holds a mace and bow (Bunce: 611). There are ten incarnations of Vishnu known as Khyab 'jug gi 'jug pa. Khyab 'jug is sometimes identified as the Indian planetary god Rahu (Bunce: 417; Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 77,115) but, in the context of the scripture under review, Vishnu is to be identified.

80. Brahma is also one of the lha chen brgyad, a grouping of eight Indian gods. Tshangs pa dkar po was first bound to an oath by King Srong btsan sgam po and entrusted with the protection of the Khra 'brug lha khang (Ladrang Kalsang: 86). Later, King Khri srong lde btsan and Gu ru rin po che put the rNam dag khrims khang gling at bSam yas under his protection (Ladrang Kalsang: 86). Tshangs pa dung gi thor tshugs can is described (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 145-147) as white in color with one head and two hands, with a conch shell rising out of his top knot. He is usually depicted holding a long crystal sword in his right hand and a jewel-filled bowl in his left hand, a snare of lightning and a lance with a silk banner attached to it. He is adorned with heavenly jewels and wears golden armor. With his third eye he can see all that happens in the three worlds.

The Bon po claim that Tshangs pa dung gi thor tshugs can is the same deity as Srog bdag rgyal po nyi pang sad, called Shel 'gying rgyal po nyi pang sad in Zhang zhung (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 147). Bon texts describe him dressed in white silk, wearing the characteristic white conch toupee, a bow and quiver hanging from his girdle, and brandishing a white lance he rides a white horse (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 147).

81. gNam thel dkar po is described (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 97,98) as a haughty god with an angry smile and white body, who rides a white horse. His attributes are a crystal sword or a battle lance and divination arrow and jewelled armor. Pe har, who is supposed to be a form of gNam thel dkar po, is an important 'jig rten pa'i srung ma, hailing originally from either Bhata Hor or Mi nyag (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 94,97). In one legend, he was at first a sky-dwelling deity but in a middle bskal pa he dwelt in Hor and was known as Shel ging dkar po, before finally coming to bSam yas to take his place as an important protector of Tibet (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 66). For more detailed data on Pe har see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 95-134; Tucci 1949, pp. 719-742, Vitali 1996, pp. 202-208, 215-219. In the Bon tradition, he was subdued and made a protector by the yi dam dBal gshen stag lha me 'bar at the border of the lha and srin. See *Bon skyong sgrub thabs bskang gsol bcas* vol. 2, no. 248. gNam thel dkar po has several important functions on the Byang thang. He is the pho lha (father's god) of the family of the Pho pho, the protector of the lineage of the erstwhile rulers of the province of Nag tshang. This function as a pho lha is said to extend back to the pre-Buddhist period, when this deity

was the pho lha of the central Asian kingdom of Hor See *Bon skyong sgrub thabs bskang gsol bcas* vol. 2, no. 248. According to local legends prevailing in Nag chu, gNam thel dkar po was the special protector of Genghiz Khan and is closely associated with the gzhi bdag gNam ra, the rgyab ri (back mountain) of Genghiz Khan. A rgyab ri is a mountain deity that is intimately involved in a person's destiny. It is unseen but always active, influencing the behavior and circumstances of the person it is attached to. Its ubiquitous presence is likened to a person's back, hence the name. gNam thel dkar po is also the clan deity (rus brgyud lha) of certain clans in the vicinity of gNam ra, in Bar tha township, and of clans in sBra chen county, as well as other areas of eastern Nag chu prefecture.

82. The name Hor was first given to the Uighurs of Kanchow around 800 by Tibetans and was later used to describe the Mongols of Genghiz Khan, from which the five Hor principalities of Khams derived their name. The Mongolian-speaking Mongolians are also called Sog pa. The name Sog appears to be related to the ancient Sogdians called Sog dag in the early Tibetan language. See Stein, p. 34. The Sog pa and Hor pa created a form of ornamentation called the Central Asian Animal Style, which became popular on the Byang thang. For a description of the Central Animal Style, see Roerich 1967. In 1207, Genghiz Khan (1162-1227) is reported to have invaded and conquered Tibet (Kwanten: 30). In the *Hor chos 'byung* it records that the Tshal pa chief Kun dga' rdo rje submitted to the great Mongol (Kwanten: 53-56). There are, however, contradictions between the Mongolian and Tibetan sources regarding Genghiz Khan's invasion as well as inconsistencies, and the historicity of this event is not well established (Kwanten: 30-60). Using his fief of Gansu as a springboard, Genghiz Khan's grandson, Go dan, made raids into Tibet to plunder monasteries (Kwanten: 74) The first incursion apparently took place in 1240 in the 'Dam region under the Mongol commander Milici. A month later, under the general rDo rta, Rwa sgreng and rGyal lha khang were destroyed and much of Tibet conquered (Kwanten: 74,75). There were other Mongol military actions in 1249, 1251-1252, 1267, 1277, and in 1285 General Tamur suppressed the revolt of the 'Bri gung pa (Kwanten: 77-79,125,126). Mongol military occupation of Tibet was quite extensive and there was a Mongol military administration as well as a Tibetan civil administration (Kwanten: 150-162). It is important to note that the term Hor pa was applied to successive waves of Mongolian invaders in the gNyan chen thang lha region well into the 18th century and during the devastating Dzungar (Jun gar) invasion. In the mid-17th century, for instance, Gushri Khan and part of his Qosot Mongol horde settled in the 'Dam district (Hedin vol.3: 40).

83. The historical allusions to the Hor pa in legends are derived from the invasions of 13th century. This eventually resulted in intermarriage between the Hor pa and the indigenous 'brog pa, giving rise to the Hor clans of Nub Hor (West Hor).

84. The presence of the Hor pa in Nub Hor is preserved in the eight traditional 'brog pa camps of the 'Dam gzhung region called the Hor gzhung 'Dam bgya shog brgyad. These eight camps are: Chos 'khor, Shog kha, dByin rgod, 'A shus, Phen gya, O thog, Ko khrab, Sog po and sBal tshang. The progenitors of these clans are said to be the semi-mythical Seven

Horsemen of Hor. The geographical penetration of the Hor pa can also be correlated to the 'brog pa traditions affecting gNyan chen thang lha. According to some of the most informed sources of the region, namely the lamas and sngags pa, the attribution of gNyan chen thang lha with gNam thel dkar po is an alien one which has been resisted for centuries. This is borne out in the Bon tradition, where gNyan chen thang lha and gNam thel dkar po are unrelated protective deities. With the possible exception of Hor pa clans, on its inner side gNyan chen thang lha is not customarily worshipped as gNam thel dkar po, nor are the two considered synonymous.

85. See *Padma dbang gi gter sung cho*, fol. 5v; *'Dzam gling spyi bsangs*, fol. 3r; Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma, fol. 17r,17v.

86. See *Grub dbang gong ma'i byin gyis brlabs pa'i gnas*, pp. 5,6; sTag lung rTse sprul thub bstan rgyal mtshan, p. 11.

87. Marici is portrayed usually as either red or yellow in color riding in a chariot drawn by seven pigs. As a form of Vajravarahi (rDo rje phag mo), she is the consort of Hayagriva and often accompanies Green Tara. Her attributes vary, but she is commonly depicted with a vajra or fly whisk in her right hand and a branch of the Ashoka tree in her left. A yellow form of Marici has three heads, with eight or 16 hands and her attributes include a hook, needle, bow and arrow, a branch of the Ashoka tree, vajra and thread. There is also a red wrathful form of the goddess. Through their identification with rDo rje phag mo, Lha mo 'od zer can ma and gNam mtsho essentially share a common identity, though it must be stressed that their consort is gNyan chen thang lha and not Hayagriva. In both cases, the traditional scheme of a female lake mating with a male mountain is retained. For a description of Marici, see Getty, pp. 132-134; Bunce, pp. 334.

88. For the use, ritual and tradition of the mandala in Tibetan Buddhism, see Tucci 1971; Brauen.

89. See sTag lung rTse sprul thub bstan rgyal mtshan, p. 16; Text *Nga 53* folio 5v,5r; Text *Ka-23*, folios 4v-7r.

90. See *Dri za'i rgyal po rdo rje bar ba rtsal la gyi rten mdos. bsKang mdos.bZlog mdos kyi rim pa rgyal ba gzig gi rnam 'phrul* of the Fifth Dalai Lama's *gSung 'bum dkar chag, gSung nang ma* series, number Ka-26 (hereafter called Text *Ka-26*) 17 folios, folios 4v, 5r. The colophon reads: "Ces [Text name] di ni gzhung lugs kyi po ti g.yag shad tsam la gzigs pa yangs pa'i gsar ma phyogs la mkho byed med par ma zad. sNga 'gyur kyi bstan 'dzin ral khur lci ba kho nas thu stobs che zhing bla gos 'jol bar tsam gyis tshul khrims dag pa rnams la rngo thogs par mi snang yang. bDag dang bdag 'dra'i sngags chung gsar bu rnams kyi dran gsos su zur thams cad mkhyan pa chos dbyings rang grol dang [followed by two illegible syllables] tshang pa rnam gnyis kyi bka' drin las mdo glud yas kyi phyag brgya la goms 'dris dang ldan pa'i za hor gyi sngags smyon rdo rje thogs med rtsal gyis mgon po g.yul bzlog dang khro chu dug sdong nas kha cung zad bkang zhing gzhan ma'i tshig sbyor rnams gsar du brgrigs te shing stag gro zhun zla ba'i dpal yon dga' ston gyi tshes la pho brang chen po po ta lar sbyar ba'i yi ge pa ni sdom brtson 'jam dbyangs grags pas bgyis pa ja yantu." In the colophon, it is stated that the Fifth Dalai Lama composed the text in the Po ta la palace in the

Wood Tiger Year (1674) and his scribe was 'Jam 'dbyangs grags pa. The Fifth Dalai Lama conveys his modesty as per tradition, but also points out that he has seen a pile of texts as large as a three-year old yak and that he is familiar with mdo, glud and yas offering rituals. He expresses his gratitude to Chos dbyings rang grol and another individual whose name is illegible in the text used for this study. Most importantly, the Fifth Dalai Lama informs his readers that this work is derived from the texts *mGon po g.yul bzlog* and *Khro chu dug sdong*.

91. In Text *Ka-26*, the east side of the mandala is occupied by the white Zhi mdzad rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal, the pacifyer (fol. 4r,4v). In his right hand he holds a medicinal plant next to his heart and in his left hand he grasps a vase (bum pa) filled with nectar. He is seated with one leg folded and one leg extended and is surrounded by a retinue of healing deities (sman gyi lha) generating healing energies. In the south quarter is the yellow rGyas mdzad rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal, the conqueror (fol. 4v), with a flaming jewel in his right hand held next to his heart and a box of treasure steadied with his left hand on his left knee. He sits with one leg extended and the other folded, and is surrounded by a retinue of yaksas and treasure guards (nor gi bdag po). In the west quarter is dBang gi lha rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal, the empowerer, who is red in color (fol. 4v). He is holding a long life vase made of ruby with both hands and is seated in the lotus position. His retinue is composed of a multitude of long life deities (tshe'i lha) and sages (drang srong). The north of the mandala is occupied by Kar ma las kyi khro bo rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal, the executor of wrathful activity (fol. 4v). He has a fierce black appearance, bloodshot eyes, red-yellow hair standing on end and bared fangs. He also has a venomous snake around his neck and a bejewelled girdle with another venomous snake and gold ornaments. In his right hand, he brandishes a spear and in his left hand he clutches an iron bow and arrow. His Hor pa style boots are decorated with jewels. He rides a winged black horse, circled by a cloud of fire, and his retinue consists of a multitude dregs pa leaders.

92. In the southwestern quarter of the mandala is Lha chen gzhon nu skyes bu bzhin bzang (the Great Lha, the Holy Youth with the Salutary Face) (fol. 4v,5r), described as white in color and standing on a lotus and moon cushion. He has turquoise-colored hair, teeth of conch, white clothes, and his right hand is raised in benediction, while his left hand is placed on his hip. His retinue consists of many helpers with the same appearance. A white youth (skyes bu dkar po) is also associated with rTa rgo rin po che. These figures may represent vestigal anthropomorphic forms of the sacred mountains.

The southwest quarter is occupied by 'Brong g.yag zhol dkar (the Wild Yak with the White Fringe)(fol. 5r), who is depicted standing astride enemies of the religion. He has very long iron horns, mist coming from his mouth, and his hoofs are kicking up fire. His servants are many wild yak. The yak, especially the wild yak ('brong), is the most prevalent emanation of gNyan chen thang lha, which explains why it found a place in the tantric mandala of the mountain. To this day, the yul lha gNyan chen thang lha is believed by the 'brog pa to emanate as a white yak. White male stud yaks, of which there are reportedly two or three among the many hundreds of yaks at gNam mtsho, are very highly prized, and are believed to share the same divine essence as gNyan chen thang lha. In contemporary 'brog pa culture,

they are the supreme animated manifestation of gNyan chen thang lha, and there is little doubt that this is a tradition with a long history.

Yaks, like the yul lha mountains, have an evil or destructive facet to their personality, which displays the demonic or adversative side of their nature. The massiveness, ferocity and potential destructiveness of the yak, especially in its wild form, is related to its evil role in mythology. For an interesting discussion of the negative aspect of the yak couched in the language of psychoanalysis, see Paul, pp. 264-286. The discussion centers around three celebrated instances of the demonic yak in Tibetan literature: 1) The destruction of a red demon yak that embodied the Byang srin and rKong srin by King gNya' khri btsan po with the aid of tutelary deities and self-acting weapons; 2) the role of the yak demon in the demise of King Gri gum btsan po; and 3) the exploits of gLing Ge sar depicting his victory over various yak demons.

In the northwest quarter is the bright red dPa' bo rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal (the Hero of the Force of the Blazing Vajra)(fol. 5r). He is found in a coral abode, seated on a lotus and sun cushion with one leg folded and one leg extended, with a hook in his right hand and a lasso in his left hand. The concept of the hero in conjunction with sacred mountains is an ancient one. The rest of the deity's name, however, is derived from Vajrayana tradition.

In the northeast is the orange Srid gsum gyi bdag po (the Master of the Three Spheres of Existence)(fol. 5r), described as somewhat wrathful. He is resting on a bed of jewels with a lotus, sun and moon cushion which is placed on top of male and female enemies of the religion. Like the deities of the cardinal directions, he has three eyes, two hands, a jewelled crown, golden girdle and Hor pa style boots. He has a long wispy beard, hair the color of sindhura, and three conches spiralling clockwise, decorated with flaming jewels in his toupee. In his right hand, he grips a flaming sword, and in his left hand, he holds a spinning golden wheel with 1,000 spokes. He wears a tiger skin around his waist, a snake over his torso, and is surrounded by a flaming aureole. It is clear from this iconographic description that it refers to Tshangs pa, although he is not mentioned by name. With the inclusion of Tshangs pa among the nine aspects of gNyan chen thang lha, the question arises, why does he appear in the list of the six different names of gNyan chen thang lha? The answer to this question seems to lie in the different types of Tshangs pa mentioned. In this case, the accent was on Srid gsum gyi bdag po. This name denotes gNyan chen thang lha's dominion over the three realms of existence, and is an appellation originating in the early Bon tradition. As lord of the world, the Indian Tshangs pa can be identified with the Bon Srid gsum gyi bdag po.

93. Khra is also translated as hawk, but because white falcons are found at gNyan chen thang lha, falcon is the most appropriate translation in this context.
94. See *Ti se pom ra thang lha gsum gyi bsang bskong*, fol. 6v.
95. See *Padma dbang gi gter sung cho*, fol. 6r.
96. In a chapter of *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, written in the 1st century B.C.E., guardians of the K'un-lun mountains include the K'ai-ming with its feline body and nine heads accompanied by a six-headed hawk (Birrel: 183). The tradition of sacred mountains in China

can be traced back to the Marchmounts, sacred peaks on the cardinal directions which may have been worshipped as early as the Shang dynasty. In the Han period, they were part of an imperial cult. In the *Shanhaijing*, some of which pre-dates the Han dynasty, Mount Min in Sichuan is inhabited by gods with dragon heads and horse bodies. This same text also mentions gods of the Great Palace Mountain which have three heads with human faces. In the *Huayangguozhi* (mid-4th century) the Seven-Fold Mountain is inhabited by a ferocious snake called the Viper, a regional protector and gatekeeper of the Chengdu plain. This primordial deity whose primary attribute was thunder, was the object of a fertility cult centered around thunder as a rain-bringer. The *Baopuzi* by Ge Hong (283-43) relates that all the mountains have gods and spirits, good and evil ones among them. The text states that those who trespass on a mountain's territory risk being wounded, killed, afflicted by disease and attacked by wild animals. In early Chinese accounts, the spirits of mountains are considered dangerous due to their amorality, capriciousness and supernatural power, and they must be propitiated. For a survey of early mountain deities in China, see Kleeman.

97. See Text *Ka-26*, fol. 4v, Text *Ka-23*, fol. 22v.

98. See *Ti se pom ra thang lha gsum gyi bsang bskong*, fol. 6r.

99. gNyan chen thang lha is also called Yar bzhur gnyan gyi sras (Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma: fol. 15v). As protector of the Tibetan realm and kingdom, he is called sKu lha gnyan chen thang lha (Ngag dbang bkra shis dpal: fol. 3r). gNyan chen thang lha is frequently called the gTer gyi bdag po (Treasure Master), which is interconnected with his title kLu'i rgyal po (King of the kLu) because the klu are traditionally the guardians of treasures. When the wrathful side of his personality is accented he may be called gNyan chen drag po thang lha (*'Dzam gling spyi bzang*, fol. 2v). In another wrathful aspect gNyan chen thang lha is called Thang nag rdo rje 'bar ba, rider of black horse who, with a sword in his right hand, cuts the life force of the rgyal po and 'gong classes of demons (classes of demons found in the retinue of Pe Har) (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp 284,285),and eats the hearts of the dam sri (a demonic type of sri also found in the retinue of Pe har)(Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 302-304) with his left hand (sTag lung rtse sprul: 15). Other names include rDo rje dbyings phyug 'bar ba rtsal and Mes kyi rgyal po thod dkar rje (the Great Ancestor King with the White Turban)(sTag lung rtse sprul: 15). The significance of this last name remains a riddle; it may allude to an ancient ancestor cult.

The riddle of who Mes (sic myes) kyi rgyal po thod dkar rje is may be answered by the rare texts stored in the library of the Potala which, as of 1995, were not accessible to foreign researchers. Reportedly, the *gSung 'bum dkar chag* of sTag phu sprul sku blo bzang chos kyi dbang phyug gam gar gyi dbang po, contains valuable material for the study of gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho. The pertinent texts are (Ka-34) *bTsan rgod gnyan rnge rgyal ba thod dkar gyi bskang ba shags bstod pa 'phrin bcol dang bcos ba la*—5 folios; (Ka-36) *Sras mchog khyung ri smug po la gsol mchod bya tshul la*—2 folios; (Ka-37) *gNyan sras nags lha'i bka' stod las phyed sngags chen po jo bo rkyang ri rngag nag la gsol mchod bya tshul la*—3 folios; and (Ka-45) *gNam mtsho phyug mo'i gnas dkyil 'khor rgya mtsho'i lha tshogs la gsol mchod la*—7 folios. Text

Ka-34 evidently talks about Mes kyi rgyal po thod dkar rje, see gSung 'bum dkar chag, pp. 551-569.

100. A daughter or sister (lcam) of gNyan chen thang lha, who wears a turquoise cloak, is recorded in Text *Ka-23* as 'Bri rje gang bzang ma; see fol. 22r.
101. The son of gNyan chen thang lha is also called Thang sras mchor po, and is a white man with turquoise eyebrows, see Text *Ka-23* fol. 22r.
102. See *Padma dbang gi gter sung cho*, fol. 5r.
103. In the text available for examination, the second syllable of this deity's name is illegible.
104. The description of the horse is given, but the text does not actually mention a horse. This is repeated several times in the following passages. rMa sprul rin po che and his associates are adamant that a horse is implied here.
105. The word rje is written here and in the following descriptions of gNyan chen thang lha's livestock. This, however, is erroneous according to rMa sprul rin po che and his associates. The actual word is rdzes (keeper of livestock). This is corroborated by the two other texts examined, which deal with the mountain's ancient retinue.
106. The lha pa, for security reasons, was unable to go into trance but was willing to discuss the subject with the author.
107. The text he uses is *Lha chen thang lha gnyan po sgrub cing mchod pa'i 'phrin las kyi chog tshang pa'i lha'i rnga chen bya ba bzhugs so.*
108. This valuable ethnographic work on spirit-mediums was conducted in the Pokhara area of Nepal in 1970-1971; see Berglie 1976.



gNam mtsho phyug mo

CHAPTER TWO

gNam mtsho in History, Religion, and Mythology

Introduction

The female counterpart of gNyan chen thang lha is the enormous lake gNam mtsho at the margin of the range. gNam mtsho shares many qualities with gNyan chen thang lha and they belong to related species of genius loci. Like gNyan chen thang lha, gNam mtsho is a powerful protector of everyday concerns and is a custodian of the land, including ecological processes and climatological phenomena. gNam mtsho represents the female aspect of the physical environment in its personified form, and she is an A pa hor etiological deity or a symbol of the origination of the universe. Stemming from her prominence in ancient Byang thang culture, gNam mtsho has come to encompass a number of key Bon and Buddhist deities.

In Tibetan mtsho means lake and by extension also refers to seas or the primordial ocean (rgya mtsho). The name of this particular lake, gNam (variously called sTeng), is often translated as sky, but more fundamentally it is the empyrean or highest celestial sphere. It does not represent the firmament (nam mkha') with its stars and planets, nor the paradise of deities (mtho ris)(cf. Tucci 1949: 719,720), but rather the realm of the lha or the host of ethereal deities. The gnam also plays a pivotal part in the early theogonies and cosmogonies of Tibetans. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the yang gsang lugs cosmogony was based on the cosmic womb (rum), which constituted two clearly demarcated spheres, gnam and sa, in which creation occurred.

In the emergence of the world, gods and human beings, the gnam forms an intermediate zone between the void and earth. For example, in the *Can lnga* myths, the celestial sTag cha ya yol, the father of 'O lde gung rgyal, resides in sTeng mel in the 13th stage of heaven. 'O lde gung rgyal is also the youngest member of the celestial Yab lha bdag drug, the deified ancestors of the Tibetan people including King gNya' khri btsan po (Haarh: 255,258,260,261,311,317). A supreme class of priest found in the pre-Buddhist Yar lung dynasty, called gNam bon gshen po, were advocates of the religion and the religious power of the kings (Haarh: 108). According to the annals of the Fifth Dalai Lama, gNam bon was introduced to the Yar lung kingdom during the reign of Gri gum btsan po (Norbu 1995: xix).

The Mongolian tengri is a literal translation of gnam. Tengri (the heaven) was the

highest sphere in a tripartite cosmos which ruled over the fate of living beings among the Turkic peoples of the 6th to 12th centuries (Vainshtein: 59).[1] In Central Asia, Tengri was the supreme sky god with dominion over a number of secondary gods of the mountains, earth and water. The tengri of early Central Asian culture and gnam, therefore, appear to be related. It is uncertain when gNam mtsho became known by its alternative name tengri, but it is likely to have gained some popularity during the colonization of the Hor pa. This alternative name has now fallen out of favor among the 'brog pa of the region, if indeed it ever had a wide currency.

The origin of the name gNam mtsho can be inferred from textual sources, although is never explicitly stated. There are, however, at least three oral traditions explaining why gNam mtsho is endowed with this name. The most literal of these is that the lake has the ability to mimic the color of the sky. Indeed, gNam mtsho captures every subtlety of hue displayed by the sky above. A related tradition calls gNam mtsho the mirror of the sky (gnam.gyi me long), and asserts that the lake is the aqueous counterpart of the celestial realm by virtue of its perfect reflection; the me long held by gNam mtsho phyug mo is said to symbolize this perfect correspondence of gNam mtsho and gnam.

A third tale, which has much currency among the residents of Bon sPo che but is also known to at least one Buddhist sngags pa at gNam mtsho, relates that she is the mother of the lha. As primordial deity and srid pa'i lha, she represents the cradle of creation from which all manner of beings, including those who reside in the gnam, issue. This generative function of gNam mtsho led first to the manifestation of the celestial beings—hence the name of the lake. Quite a few 'brog pa refute this explanation or are unaware of it, probably as a result of centuries of exposure to Buddhist cosmologies. They believe that gNam mtsho is not the source of the lha and other celestial deities, but a reflection of their activities and qualities.

In popular myth, gNam mtsho is linked with the oceans as well as the sky and heaven. It is said that the lake is the well of the earth which is centrally connected to all the seas of the world; the water of the lake and the waters of the oceans are thought to mingle and flow freely.

There is also an ancient legend regarding the origins of gNam mtsho which states that gNam mtsho was once an insignificant body of water. Living near it was an elderly couple who used to collect water from the lake with a vessel. One day they forgot to replace the lid and the water spilled from the vessel and created the present-sized gNam mtsho. A common tale in Tibet recounts that in ancient times the country was inundated by an ocean and did not become habitable until, through the good graces of Thugs rje chen po, it was drained. In 1748, the polymath gSum pa mkhan po related that during the first visit of the Indian sage Dam pa Sangs rgyas (d. 1117), the "two turquoise lakes" of gNam mtsho and Yar 'brog g.yu mtsho were interconnected (Stein: 38). While it is true that (millions of years ago) much of the Plateau was under the Tethys sea, and that in the post-Glacial Age the level of the lakes was much higher, this certainly was not the

case 900 years ago. The legend is so strong, however, that it is still widely accepted among the 'brog pa.

Strictly speaking, gNam mtsho is not a gzhi bdag or a yul lha although she serves many of the same functions. As a yul lha, gNyan chen thang lha is a protector of people, livestock and the countryside; gNam mtsho fills the same roles as a guardian of an individual's prosperity, happiness and health. The main difference between gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha is their gender. The female gNam mtsho is a mother figure, which in the contemporary period is characterized by the roles of sustainer, helper and nurturer. She is also a srid pa'i lha, although her ancient identity as a progenetrix has been largely superseded by Buddhist cosmogonic conceptions. More markedly than gNyan chen thang lha, gNam mtsho is mistress and guardian of the herds whose health, well-being and fecundity is directly dependent on the predilections of the lake goddess. Her extensive life-force impacts all other organisms within the bounds of her approximately 3,500 square kilometer basin.

The Personality of gNam mtsho phyug mo

gNam mtsho phyug mo's effect on living beings, like gNyan chen thang lha's, depends to a large extent on the behavior of these beings towards her. The lake goddess is not an entirely benevolent force; she can have a negative, even a pernicious effect on living organisms. Her dispensation of largesse or loss, happiness or wrath, conducive or unconducive conditions, is largely dependent on the treatment meted out to her by human beings. It is this provisional response to people that best defines the worldly or samsaric nature of the goddess. The belief in the salutary and deleterious effects of gNam mtsho phyug mo is a salient one among the 'brog pa, deeply coloring their awareness of the environment and their own welfare.

gNam mtsho's influence on humans, animals and spirits is exerted through three different avenues. One is the generalized impact of her srog which, unlike that of gNyan chen thang lha, is not centered on a columnar structure but rather forms a vast pool which wells up from the depth of the lake to cover all organisms within her sphere. The goddess gNam mtsho phyug mo is frequently believed to live deep within the center of the lake; thus this is where her life-force is centered. Her srog, conceived of as a reservoir of energy harbored in the depths of the lake, has been merged with the tantric notion of a pool of spiritual energy at the base of the spinal column (gsang gnas chen) by the 'brog pa. Nevertheless, in its essential form, the srog constitutes the pre-Buddhist understanding of the animate nature of gNam mtsho. The srog of the lake infuses the surrounding land with sa yi bcud (the sap of the earth), the systemic nutritive quality of the earth on which the fecundity of the soil depends. The sa yi bcud vitalizes the soil and feeds the plants, which in turn nourish the livestock.

This belief in the vital nature of the lake is still very strong and the 'brog pa look upon it with considerable awe, respect and even trepidation. In effect, the 'brog pa and

their livestock, as well as other creatures who live near the shores of the lake, are like satellites revolving around this provider of the mundane necessities. Perhaps, in ancient times, the life-forces of the inhabitants of the region were conceived of as inseparable from the super-ordinate srog of gNam mtsho. It is not such a large conceptual step from a giant srog having a bearing on the smaller srog in its proximity, to all the srog being interconnected, if not qualitatively the same.

Another avenue by which gNam mtsho affects the fortunes of those living around her is via the beings said to reside in her waters. The two main resident elemental beings or forces are said to be the sman and klu; the sman are always female and the klu both male and female. These semi-divine beings have a reputation for both harm and help and are the focus of a significant number of the exorcisory and purificatory rituals held in the region. If angered or transgressed upon, the sman and klu can have a noxious effect on human beings and livestock. The easiest way to raise their antagonism is to pollute water sources, either intentionally or unintentionally. Another way to anger them is to go into the lake at the wrong time or in the wrong place and trespass into the domain of the klu and sman. It is believed that if someone is so foolish as to do this, he or she may never be heard of again. The klu and sman are also thought to punish people for fishing, although the 'brog pa are not inclined to do this. Conversely, when contented, the sman and klu play a vital role in the well-being of livestock, facilitating their reproduction and health. The benevolence or malevolence of the klu are largely determined by whether they belong to an auspicious or inauspicious class of these spirits. As a rule, the sman are less problematic than the klu.

The third and most important avenue of interaction of gNam mtsho with people and animals is through the volition of the primary goddess of the lake, gNam mtsho phyug mo (the Mother of Riches of Heaven Lake). This goddess has become associated with a number of Buddhist deities, but in her most basic form, she is the aboriginal goddess of gNam mtsho. Her name perfectly sums up her function and character as a bestowing and nurturing goddess. Without her, the 'brog (pasture) would cease to grow and human society would be untenable. Therefore her maternal ministrations are thought by the 'brog pa to be indispensable to the welfare of sentient beings.

This worldly protector, who is invoked at least once in any bskang ba or gsol kha directed to gNyan chen thang lha, is also frequently invoked in her own right. She is believed to be instrumental in ensuring the well-being of the 'brog pa in virtually all facets of everyday life. Unlike the generalized, unconscious response of the osmotic srog, this avenue of interaction between the lake and the everyday concerns of the 'brog pa occurs through conscious thought and action. If she is well disposed towards someone, she is thought to be able to endow them with prosperity and happiness; but if she has an inimical relationship with an individual, he or she is sure to suffer (unless this imbalance is corrected through ritual means). Here, once again, we see the inherent ambivalence of deities that personify natural objects and phenomena.

Let us now examine two instances when the animate and sentient aspects of gNam mtsho suffered defilement or imbalance. Circa 1970, the Chinese government launched a small fleet of metal-hulled fishing boats on gNam mtsho to help meet their demand for food. The 'brog pa were very concerned about this development, and predicted the outcome of this violation of the sanctity of gNam mtsho. The fishing boats quickly fell prey to the ferocious squalls that erupted on the lake without warning. At least a couple of the boats were sunk and there was loss of life. Consequently, the plan to fish gNam mtsho was rapidly aborted. The rusting hulks of several of these fishing boats are still beached on the eastern lake shore.

In 1994, a Chinese vessel returned to gNam mtsho once again. The worst fears of the 'brog pa were realized when an unusually dry summer was followed by a harsh, snowy winter, and many of the local herds suffered great damage. There is a conviction among some of the pastoralists that this untoward weather was the result of the violation of gNam mtsho by the rogue vessel. Whether it be drought or blizzard, the lake is believed to have a direct influence over meteorological conditions, using them for retribution. Conversely, good weather is synonymous with a contented goddess. It is striking that 1,200 years of Buddhism and the doctrine of karma have not obliterated these ancient beliefs concerning the 'brog pa's relationship with the natural environment.

The following account related by Gur chung rin po che speaks of the power of gNam mtsho to give and take from the 'brog pa.[2] About 40 years ago, Gur chung rin po che was officiating at a religious ceremony sponsored by a family camped at mGar lha mo gdong, on the south side of gNam mtsho. During the ceremony, an alien flock of sheep got mixed with the local family's herd. The mixing of herds is problematic for the 'brog pa because it can cause a confusion in ownership, so the family members quickly attempted to separate them. After the family had segregated the sheep, they watched the alien herd strangely head for the lake and disappear into the water. To the family's horror, 40 or 50 of their own animals followed and met their end. Two or three years later, the loss of livestock was compensated by unexpected wealth coming to the family. True to her reputation and namesake, gNam mtsho phyug mo became the purveyor of wealth. The lake goddess had turned loss into gain.

In the Buddhist tradition, it is accepted that gNam mtsho phyug mo was subdued and bound to an oath by Gu ru rin po che during a visit to the lake. At gNam mtsho there are a number of caves which are believed to have been used by the Vajrayana master for meditation and magic. According to Gur chung rin po che, gNam mtsho phyug mo churned up from her waters terrible specters and creatures in an effort to deter Gu ru rin po che from completing his mission. In response, Gu ru rin po che magically expanded his hand until it covered the lake. This grand action subjugated the powerful goddess and led to her becoming a Buddhist protector (chos skyong) of the worldly variety ('jig rten pa'i srung ma). The imprint of Gu ru rin po che's hand is said to still be visible on the lake.[3] The best place to see this print or phyag rjes, says Gur

chung rin po che, is from the vantage point of his monastery, Gur chung dgon pa, located on the southwestern corner of the lake. In the *Lha 'dre bka thang*, gNam mtsho is one of the four great lakes of Tibet subdued by Gu ru rin po che (Blondeau: 95,96).

Incense texts devoted exclusively to gNam mtsho phyug mo are rare. The longest one to come to light is a seven folio text by sTag phu sprul sku blo bzang chos kyi dbang phyug, which unfortunately was not available for study (see Chapter One, end note 100). The only other incense text, known simply as *gNam mtsho phyug mo'i gsol mchod*, is attributed to the fourth Bya do sprul sku.[4] This manuscript states that gNam mtsho phyug mo is found in the Northern Continent beside Dri za'i rgyal po. The goddess is described as an embodiment of gNam mtsho, a place of many marvels, sapphire blue in color, surrounded by snow mountains, and with rivers entering her from the 10 directions.[5] Next, and throughout the remainder of the text, gNam mtsho phyug mo is treated as a goddess resident of the lake. Her palace is described as a turquoise tent with jewelled pillars and gold and silver adorning its ridge; there are many jewelled articles in her palace. In the middle of it is the goddess' throne made of many kinds of jewels.

The goddess, now called sMan btsun gnam mtsho phyug mo, is described as young and very beautiful with a divine appearance, smiling countenance and demure look. Her skin is smooth and supple and she wears a head ornament of gold, turquoise, red silk, ut pa la[6] and other kinds of flowers. In her right hand is a chu srin rgyal mtshan (victory banner of the chu srin) and in her left hand a silver tray of jewels; she is mounted on a turquoise-colored dragon. On her right side are gNyan chen thang lha and his male retinue, and on her left side are the bstan ma bcu gnyis, tshe ring mched lnga and the ya ma skong ma, which represent three groups of pre-Buddhist goddesses. Behind her are many servants and in front of her are lha, klu, dri za and mi' am ci,[7] and many other helpers. The text then states that gNam mtsho phyug mo was bound by an oath to Heruka, which undoubtedly reinforced the efforts of Gu ru rin po che. The text presents a somewhat contrived theogony of the goddess, beginning with her root form as the goddess rDo rje mkha' 'gro ma (Vajradakini). She then reincarnated as rDo rje kun grags ma, then as 'Dod khams bdag mo (appellation of dPal ldan lha mo), then as rDo rje sman btsun, and then as gTer gyi bdag mo, before finally manifesting as gNam mtsho phyug mo.

gNam mtsho phyug mo is also called gNam mtsho rgyal mo, gNam mtsho mtsho mo and gNam mtsho phyug mo rang byung rgyal mo; gNam mtsho phyid mo (the Frozen Celestial Lake Mother), a name recorded for the goddess 100 years ago (Das: 749), is not a popular one today. Phyid, meaning to suffice or to be sufficient, is also related to its ability to sustain life. She, at least in the distant past, was also called gZi ldan klu phyug mo (the Lady of Riches, the Holder of gZi)[8] (Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma: fol. 17r). In the *Lha 'dre bka' thang* gNam mtsho phyug mo is said to be under the North Star and to be the lake of mchong (Blondeau: 96), a semi-precious stone related to

gzi. Texts *Ka-26* and *Nga-53* of the Fifth Dalai Lama, record that gNam mtsho rgyal mo has a chu srin rgyal mtshan in her right hand and a me long in her left hand, and that she is mounted on a turquoise dragon.[9] The same iconographic description is given by sTag lung rtse sprul for gNam mtsho phyug mo rang byung rgyal mo (gNam mtsho phyug mo, the Self-Manifested Queen).[10]

In the primary text of the sTag lung pa, gNam mtsho phyug mo is described as the queen who erects the great divine tent (lha yi gur chen phub pa'i rgyal mo)(Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma: fol. 17r). The Bon po describe gNam mtsho phyug mo as turquoise colored, dressed in aqueous blue robes, riding an aquatic mdzo, and possessing an army of klu.[11] In another Bon text, her name is given as sMan btsun g.yu lo phyug mo sil, and she is said to be one of the nine Byang sman chen mo goddesses.[12] The phyug mo of gNam mtsho phyug mo translates as rich woman. The word phyug (riches) has a similar orthography to phyugs, which refers to cattle. The most frequently used word for livestock, especially yaks, by the 'brog pa is nor, which also means wealth. It is likely that phyug and phyugs are etymologically related. It must be remembered that one of the primary functions of gNam mtsho phyug mo is protector and nurturer of livestock.

In all descriptions of gNam mtsho phyug mo, irrespective of sect, she holds a chu srin rgyal mtshan in her right hand. This is a kind of circular banner decorated with the head of a chu srin, and, according to sMan ri mkhan po, symbolizes mastery and dominance over all beings and creatures which live in water. This includes aquatic fauna and preternatural beings like the sman, klu and dri za. In general, the rgyal mtshan (victory banner) symbolizes the attainment of enlightenment, and is also believed to combat powers of evil (cf. Newark Museum, vol. I: 33). The makara symbolizes the life-giving powers of water and is a popular apotropaic symbol (cf. Newark Museum, vol. I: 44), as is the chu srin in Tibet. The chu srin has become assimilated with the Indian makara, a creature which resembles a crocodile. The aquatic srin, however, is originally a pre-Buddhist class of semi-divine beings similar to other types of srin, pivotal to pre-Buddhist cosmogonies and theogonies.

The mount of the gNam mtsho phyug mo is a dragon, a creature believed to live in both the sky and deep lakes such as gNam mtsho.[13] Of all the denizens of gNam mtsho, the dragon is the most spectacular. Its existence is accepted by the majority of 'brog pa living near the lake. Like many other animals, however, it is said to be more rare now then a half century ago. Traditionally, gNam mtsho was the seasonal home of two or three dragons, who were most commonly sighted when the ice on the lake broke up or when it began forming. Pastoralists still occasionally spot dragons described as a very large reptilian creature, 10 to 20 or more meters in length, diving into the lake or circling above it. Such dragons, which are often airborne, are said to migrate to gNam mtsho only in heavy cloud cover. The best time to them is supposed to be when the entire sky is cloaked in thick clouds except for a small opening overhead. At these times, dragons can be seen circling above the opening in the sky.[14]

gNam mtsho is home to other lacusterine creatures as well. During Bya do rin po che's visit to gNam mtsho in 1986, 'brog pa told him of finding rib bones of fish washed up on the lake shore, some of which were longer than a man. Sightings of huge fish occur at fairly regular intervals. The alien flock of sheep in Gur chung rin po che's account are supposed to belong to a peculiar species of aquatic sheep. There are also said to be aquatic goats, horses and 'bri, although these animals are believed to be less common than the aquatic sheep. The aquatic varieties of livestock are distinguished by their waxy, bluish coats and their proclivity to either stay in or near water. These mythical or unknown animals have been observed by a significant number of 'brog pa. A group of aquatic horses is said to have frequented Bya do. They were thought to be normal terrestrial animals until they were observed disappearing into the water. Quite naturally, there is a correlation between the shepherds and their terrestrial herds and gNam mtsho phyug mo and her aquatic herds. These kinds of vivid beliefs are best explained in terms of the wonder and awe that the local inhabitants have for the lake.

With the exception of the *gNam mtsho phyug mo'i gsol mchod* text, the goddess is always depicted with a me long in her left hand. As we have seen with the spirit-mediumship of gNyan chen thang lha, the me long represents the universe and is a temporary residence of the deities and the consciousness of the medium. According to sMan ri mkhan po, the cosmological all-inclusiveness of the me long is underscored by Srid pa'i rgyal mo, who uses it to reflect all of existence. The me long is a common ritual instrument in both Bon and Buddhism, used to reflect the qualities of deities. It is also frequently used in divination where auspicious or inauspicious visions are said to appear.[15]

The 'brog pa believe that gNam mtsho phyug mo has the ability to manifest in the form of animals. This constitutes one of the oldest living traditions and demonstrates how interconnected natural phenomena are in A pa hor culture. The most common animal manifestation of the goddess is a 'bri, the female yak. gNam mtsho as a female yak and gNyan chen thang lha as a male yak must be seen in the context of the 'brog pa economy. The yak is the most important animal to their way of life, providing milk, butter, cheese, meat, medicines, wool for felt and fabrics, hair for cordage and fabrics, horns for vessels and tools, dung for fuel and hide for clothing and other articles. The yak is also a beast of burden. The 'brog pa way of life hinges on the yak. Even in prehistory, when the hunting of the wild yak was an important activity, as the record of cave art demonstrates, it provided the people with many of their needs. Through all stages of religious and cultural development, this most vital animal has been linked with the equally important mountain and lake.

Both the yak and the Dyad are symbols of sustenance—one intimate, the other distant but no less powerful. It follows that these two most important non-human realities of 'brog pa life would become interrelated in the religious beliefs of the A pa hor. This interrelationship is so entwined that it developed into one of the most fundamental and

persistent motifs in the indigenous belief system. These two components, livestock and land base, have come to share the same symbol of the divine yak. Yak, mountain and lake, the lifeblood of the 'brog pa, are conjoined in a sacred triad. At the peak of this pyramid is the yak, which is interconnected with gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha through the agency of emanation (sprul ba). This parallel series of emanations of the divine 'bri of the lake and the divine yak of the mountain welds the Dyad together into a unified whole of coequal parts. This tradition underlines the reciprocity that defines gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha.

There is also some indication among the 'brog pa that gNam mtsho manifests as a deer or did in the past. The only way that Nam mtsho comes even closer to the people's hearts and imagination than as a 'bri is when she manifests in an anthropomorphic form. The beautiful goddess described above is not merely a figment of imagination or a metaphor describing the qualities of the lake—for the 'brog pa she is as real as the people, the animals, rocks or any other tangible object or phenomenon. The sentient reality of gNam mtsho phyug mo is affirmed each time she manifests in the human form of an A pa hor lady ('brog mo). This special event perpetuates the myth of her existence, a myth that carries more weight than most objectified phenomena.

The Portals of gNam mtsho

gNam mtsho phyug mo's underwater palace is believed to have entrances at each of the cardinal directions. These four entrances are thought to be where the goddess is especially amenable to being petitioned, and where she is most inclined to grant the wishes of those who invoke her. These mythical portals are called khrus kyi sgo bzhi (the four bathing portals) because of the conviction that ritual washing here is efficacious in removing defilements (sgrib) of all kinds. The purifying qualities of the water are believed to be strongest here and are active even if one so much as imbibes the water at the khrus kyi sgo bzhi. Due to the accessibility of gNam mtsho phyug mo and the healing nature of the water, shrines have been built at each of the bathing portals. True to the fertility function of the goddess, these shrines are patronized by women who have lost young children or have had trouble with pregnancy and childbirth.

In the rNying ma pa tradition, the bathing portals developed into a circle of four deities considered to be aspects of gNam mtsho phyug mo: these were called the khrus kyi sgo mo bzhi.[16] This local rNying ma pa tradition is probably derived from a pre-Buddhist fertility cult centered around gNam mtsho, indicated by the intensity and depth of belief the 'brog pa have in the regenerative energies of the lake. The rNying ma pa Khrus kyi sgo mo bzhi, however, is arranged and conceived of as a tantric mandala in the 'phrin las model and thus is far removed from its ancient counterpart.

On the east side of the lake is Zhi ba'i lha mo, who has a white body and holds a silver bum pa of nectar; she purifies obstacles (gdon) caused by hatred. On the west

side of gNam mtsho is Rags ma khrus kyi sgo, presided over by the goddess dBang gi mdangs 'dzin; she is coral red in color and holds a vase (bum pa) of nectar (bdud rtsi). Her benefit is to purify defilements caused by attachments. On the south side is Lha mo khrus kyi sgo, who has a gold body and holds a golden bum pa of nectar; she purifies defilements precipitated by miserliness. On the northern portal is Dam tshig can ma, who has a turquoise body and a turquoise bum pa of nectar. She purifies both defilements and obstacles brought on by envy. It is worth noting that these four goddesses closely resemble the Tshe ring mched lnga group, the goddesses of long life. The Tshe ring mched lnga goddesses are also associated with water and are said to reside in five glacial lakes of different colors at the foot of Jo mo gangs dkar or La phyi gangs (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 177). Jo mo gangs dkar is a consort of gNyan chen thang lha in the vicinity of gNam mtsho.

The Father and Mother of gNam mtsho

According to some sources, the father of gNam mtsho phyug mo is supposed to be brGya byin,[17] who is often equated with Indra, the Indian chief of the gods in Tibetan texts. brGya byin, also known as Bi har nag po and Thugs kyi rgyal po, is one of the five deities of the sku lnga group headed by Pe har; he is also in the center of the mandala of Pe har (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 107,108,121). brGya byin is dark blue and has flames issuing out of his hair; in his right hand he holds a snare and in his left a razor, both of which he deploys against demons (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 108). He wears a bearskin coat, a black silk garment, and a head covering, and rides an elephant (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 108). It seems appropriate that in the Buddhist tradition the equivalent of the Indian chief of the gods is recognized as the father of gNam mtsho, who is a powerful deity in her own right.

Unlike gNyan chen thang lha, gNam mtsho has no mother according to Buddhist texts pertaining to her sacred geography. This is frequently explained by the 'brog pa by the parthenogenesis of the goddess. This belief, of course, also precludes the need for a father, rendering brGya byin superfluous. Rang byung is a concept used to explain the spontaneous appearance of natural objects. This self-generation often has a magical or incorporeal etiology and, in many instances, phenomena seem to materialize from thin air.[18]

Among rDzogs chen practitioners, such as lama Chos bdag of Do skya dgon pa, the mother of gNam mtsho is traditionally seen as Kun tu bzang mo.[19] rDo rje phag mo is sometimes thought to be a wisdom emanation of Kun tu bzang mo, which provides the justification for identifying gNam mtsho as such. Kun tu bzang mo is the female counterpart of Kun tu bzang po, who is the embodiment of the mind of all the buddhas. He is thought of as a mind (yid) which perceives (yul can), and Kun tu bzang mo as the object which is perceived (yul)(Karmay 1988: 156,157). This philosophical parallelism is found in the Tun-huang manuscripts, where the mo or yum represents unquantifiable

external objects or that which is perceived, and yab or po represents the perceiver or mind (Karmay 1988: 156,157). Kun tu bzang mo is also called Ye phyi mo (Primordial Grandmother), whose male counterpart is sPyi mes chen po (Universal Grandfather); they both symbolize the gzhi (spiritual basis) or natural luminosity of the mind (sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba)(Karmay 1988: 135,178). The gzhi in rDzogs chen is the primordial basis which is perfect, infinite and complete and has three defining qualities: 1) its state (ngang) is pure from the beginning (ka dag); 2) it has a physical form (sku); and 3) its self-being (bdag nyid) is the primeval intellect (ye shes) which pervades all beings (Karmay 1988: 135,176,177).

gNam mtsho as Kun tu bzang mo, the mother of the buddhas in rDzogs chen, assumes a primordial dimension and instrumentality which neatly melds Buddhist doctrine with Bon and folkloric cosmogonic concepts. This primeval quality, conferred on the lake by virtue of its being the offspring of the rDzogs chen telos, is essentially an acknowledgment of the features of the archetypal mother enshrined in earlier traditions.

Incarnations of gNam mtsho

According to the *gNam mtsho phyug mo'i gsol mchod,* gNam mtsho phyug mo is the reincarnation of several other goddesses, the first being rDo rje mkha' 'gro ma (Vajradakini). In her form as rDo rje phag mo (Vajravarahi), Vajradakini plays an important role in the mythology of the lake, although usually in a separate capacity from gNam mtsho phyug mo. In her tertiary incarnation as 'Dod khams bdag mo, we see a deliberate attempt to connect the lake directly with the patroness and foremost female protector of Tibet, dPal ldan lha mo.[20] 'Dod khams refers to the entire transmigratory world of samsara, characterized by desire and full of pleasures and pains, of which dPal ldan lha mo is the ruler. 'Dod khams bdag mo is a rather incongruent attribution for gNam mtsho phyug mo because, unlike the lake goddess, dPal ldan lha mo is classed as a 'jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma—that is, a protector outside the sphere of worldly existence who has transcended the bounds of karma. As with gNyan chen thang lha, Buddhists were intent on absorbing the lake into their pantheon by whatever means necessary. As the text reveals, this tendency found its fullest expression among the dGe lugs pa, for whom dPal ldan lha mo is the chief protectress. dPal ldan lha mo is frequently depicted with the bstan ma bcu gnyis in her retinue, two members of which are intimately connected with gNam mtsho.

From her identification with dPal ldan lha mo, it is obvious that gNam mtsho phyug mo was, and is, a very important and powerful lake goddess. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the tradition of the lake, which the Tibetan people consider their bla mtsho, a distinction she shares with Yar 'brag g.yu mtsho. gNam mtsho is thought to be a repository of the souls of the entire Tibetan nation (rgyal khab kyi bla mtsho) and, consequently, can justifiably be called a natural entity of national significance. For Tibetan people, the lake is a vital and intimate symbol of what makes Tibet unique. The

fate of the Tibetans and the fate of gNam mtsho are inextricably bound. It is not surprising, then, that the identity of the lake became interconnected with dPal ldan lha mo, the chief protectress of Tibet.

Through the agency of the bla, gNam mtsho and human beings are vessels for the animating principle behind human consciousness (rnam shes). Without consciousness there is no existence, and without gNam mtsho there is no Tibetan nation. Therefore, ethnicity, consciousness and the lake are inseparable realities. This relationship between people and a body of water indicates the aboriginal element of Tibetan religion, which deified landforms and interpreted far-stretching social and cultural phenomena through this relationship. It is outstanding that at the end of the 20th century such beliefs thrive in a world where elsewhere nature has been divested of most of its spiritual existence.

This association of the lake with dPal ldan lha mo may also constitute tacit recognition of gNam mtsho's association with Srid pa'i rgyal mo, the possible precursor of dPal ldan lha mo. It is known that by the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama, A phyi gnam gyi gung rgyal was identified with dPal ldan lha mo (Tucci 1949: 719), and herein lies another hint of a link between the origins of the identity of gNam mtsho with dPal ldan lha mo. dPal ldan lha mo, a composite aboriginal deity, became assimilated with the Indian goddess Sri Devi, whose cult was introduced into Tibet by U rgyan gsang ba shes rab (Tucci 1949: 590,591), but was a relàtively late addition to the Tibetan cult of the goddess. More fundamentally, dPal ldan lha mo is a goddess of many pre-Buddhist forms. In her most ancient form, her appellations include dGra lha chen mo, dGra lha'i rgyal mo, Ma mo gtso mo, Srog bdag chen mo (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 24) and gNyan rgyal mo (Tucci 1949: 591).

Little is known about gNam mtsho phyug mo's fourth incarnation as rDo rje sman btsun (Thunderbolt Mistress of the Sman), a Buddhist sman mo goddess recorded in the *gNam mtsho phyug mo'i gsol mchod*. A worldly deity, rDo rje sman btsun was of limited local importance and was apparently connected specifically to the liturgy of Bya do dgon pa. This 'incarnation' of gNam mtsho phyug mo is not popular. The name of the fifth incarnation of gNam mtsho phyug mo is Ma 'bad dag mo. This obscure goddess is apparently a guardian of cemeteries.

In her sixth and last incarnation before assuming her present form, gNam mtsho phyug mo was gTer gyi bdag mo (the Guardian Goddess of Treasures). In this incarnation she is the direct counterpart of gNyan chen thang lha as gTer gyi bdag po—a position which closely ties her with the klu and the realm of the klu. The Divine Dyad and specifically the klu are guardians of treasure. 'Treasure', whether it is the area's mineral wealth guarded by the klu, plants and animals or scriptural treasures (gter ma), are believed to insure the viability of the land and the harmony of ecological processes. A well-known scholar of Ser ba byes grwa tshang, rGan rdo grags, observed that as treasures disappear through immoral and improper actions, the divinities of Tibet recede further and further from its people.[21]

Buddhists equate gNam mtsho phyug mo with two members of the brtan ma bcu gnyis (bstan ma bcu gnyis), the pre-Buddhist deities most closely associated with mountains. They are also known as brtan skyong ma mo bcu gnyis, ma mo btsan ma bcu gnyis, and 'dzam gling bstan ma bcu gnyis (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 182). In the Buddhist tradition, this group of goddesses is believed to have been subdued by Gu ru rin po che at either Kha rag gsang ba'i brag phug or 'U yug in gTsang (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 177). In both Bon and Buddhism, the brtan ma goddesses are considered guardians of the religion. They are also protectors of the Tibetan realm (Bod .khams). While these goddesses pre-date Buddhism, little is known about their original function. In this early period, as in the Buddhist period, these goddesses were wedded to specific places and thus probably represent autochthonous deities.

In the rNying ma pa and bKa' brgyud traditions, gNam mtsho phyug mo is equated with the brtan ma, rDo rje kun grags ma,[22] in the iconographic, functional and onomastic sense. At gNam mtsho, where the rNying ma sect is prevalent rDo rje kun grags ma is identified as the lake; locally, she is often known by the appellation gNas chen bdag chen mo (the Great Mistress of the Sacred Place). Sometimes, gNam mtsho phyug mo is referred to as the secret name (gsang mtshan) of rDo rje Kun grags ma. sTag lung rtse sprul describes her (sTag lung rtse sprul: 15) as azure blue in color, with one head, two hands and three eyes. In her right hand, she holds a rgyal mtshan, in her left hand, a me long. She rides a turquoise dragon. Her hair flows from a bun and she is beautiful in appearance. There are many variations in the members and iconography of the brtan ma bcu gnyis. For instance, in certain sadhanas rDo rje kun grags ma rides a black horse or a blue water bull, in others she is white and has a phur ba as an attribute.[23]

A detailed description of rDo rje kun grags ma is given in the sTag lung gtor ma offering text to gNam mtsho *Bod khams skyong ba'i brtan ma rnams kyi gtso mo bdag nyid chen mo rdo rje kun grags ma'i mchod gtor bzhugs so* (Offering gTor ma for rDo rje Kun grags ma the Chief Mistress of the brTan ma Goddesses, Protectors of the Tibetan Realm) authored by Ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1574-1621).[24] We learn that at a place called Thang srin mtsho, Gu ru rin po che transformed himself into Khrag 'thung chen po. Here he subjugated the brtan ma and made them protectors of Buddhism against extreme views, heresy and various diseases (fol. 6v,7r).

rDo rje kun grags ma dwells in a circular divine palace where buddhas and bodhisattvas obtain visions (fol. 2r). This palace is made from precious substances, has a fine form, and is a place of enjoyment for Zur phud lnga pa. In the center of the palace is the obedient protectress of Gu ru rin po che, helper of the pious, guardian of devotees, and slayer of the irreligious (fol. 2v).[25]

In gNyan chen thang lha ritual texts by the Fifth Dalai Lama, gNam mtsho phyug mo is equated with the brtan ma goddess, rDo rje g.yu sgron ma.[26] She is described as blue in color, with a me long and chu srin rgyal mtshan in her hands, and riding a turquoise-colored dragon. Ostensibly, because of his close connection with rDo rje g.yu

sgron ma, the Fifth Dalai Lama transposed her identity upon gNam mtsho phyug mo.[27]

In the Bon tradition, there is no brtan ma goddess who corresponds to gNam mtsho phyug mo. One list of brtan ma found in the Bon *Bar do thol gros* cites g.Yung drung kun grags ma (Tucci 1949: 741), who may be considered a counterpart of rDo rje kun grags ma. However, the correlation between the lake goddess and the brtan ma goddess is viewed as a patently Buddhist innovation. In an authoritative Bon list found in the text *brTan bzlug las bshus pa*, a gter ma discovered by rMa ston srol 'dzin at Dang ra g.yu mtsho, no mention of g.Yung drung kun grags ma is made. Although Bon experts are adamant that a brtan ma does not live in gNam mtsho, in the general area there is the mountain goddess Jo mo gangs dkar, cited as a consort of gNyan chen thang lha, who is often thought to be a brtan ma.[28]

gNam mtsho is popularly envisioned as a manifestation of Yum mchog rDo rje phag mo, the invincible Buddhist yi dam. The outline of the lake is believed to circumscribe the form of rDo rje phag mo. According to the *gNam mtsho phyug mo'i gsol mchod*, rDo rje phag mo, in her form as Vajrayogini, is considered the root incarnation of gNam mtsho phyug mo. This attribution in part owes its existence to the Tibetan tradition of creating native sacred places (gnas chen) for the Indian tantric deity bDe mchog (Cakrasamvara/Heruka).[29] The three major bDe mchog pilgrimage places (gnas chen) in Tibet are body—Gangs dkar ti se, speech—gNam mtsho phyug mo, and mind—Tshwa ri (sTag lung rtse sprul: 16). In tantric philosophy, bDe mchog is inseparable from and of the same nature as his consort, rDo rje phag mo; he represents all the bliss of the buddhas and she represents all the wisdom of the buddhas (Kelsang Gyatso 1994: 242). By virtue of this inseparability, rDo rje phag mo must also be present at gNam mtsho.

The identification of the lake with rDo rje phag mo has also to do with Buddhist yearnings to thoroughly and inexorably absorb autochthonous deities into their pantheon. A powerful deity like gNam mtsho phyug mo required a Buddhist deity commensurate with its stature. rDo rje phag mo, the most celebrated female Vajrayana deity in Tibet, was a fitting choice. Her greatness enabled her to subsume the female archetypal qualities of the pre-Buddhist goddess within her sphere of activity. This theophanic syncretism, which is still a feature of contemporary Tibetan culture, preserved the sanctity and eminence of gNam mtsho, which in turn allowed the older and newer religious traditions to cohabit in the minds of the people without dissonance. Buddhists, rather than ignoring or dismantling the holiness of gNam mtsho, went to great lengths to acknowledge her power and sanctity and to bring her into their fold with a minimum of disruption to the earlier mythos or traditions.

Although bDe mchog is connected with the gNam mtsho gnas chen, for the local residents the association between the lake and his consort is significantly stronger. This is largely due to the gender of gNam mtsho which has been female for millennia. rDo rje phag mo is a very important deity for the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud sub-sect, an institution

centrally connected with the history of gNam mtsho during the period of the second diffusion of Buddhism (bstan pa phyi dar). Consequently, it might have been the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud who introduced the cult of rDo rje phag mo to gNam mtsho. The main attributes of rDo rje phag mo are a chopper (gri gug) in her right hand, and a skull cup (ka pa la) full of blood in her left hand, symbolizing, respectively, the ability to eradicate all obscurations and the inherent emptiness of all phenomena.[30]

The 'brog pa have assigned the gNam mtsho with anthropomorphic form, corresponding to the anatomy of rDo rje phag mo.[31] The island of Srin mo do (Nang do), in the northwestern part of the lake, is commonly said to be the skull cup of rDo rje phag mo, while the narrow swath of land between the Ngang chu and Dril chu on the western lake shore represents her gri gug). The foot of her extended leg is said to be Has po ri gdong on the eastern shoreline and her head is on the opposite side of the lake. Her three upwardly gazing eyes are thought to be three small lakes (mtsho'u chung). Not far from them on the west side of gNam mtsho is the craggy hill of Lha lcam khan pa, the protuberance on the top of the goddess' head (gtsug tor). The five diadems on the crown (rigs lnga) of rDo rje phag mo are five lake-side escarpments and river valleys in the west—Do skya, Do mar, 'Bo chu, Tsha chu and 'Bo zil. The other two islands of gNam mtsho, Chig do and gLang do, are said by local sources to represent the knees of rDo rje phag mo. In the oral tradition of the 'brog pa, the inlet formed by the bKra shis do headland represents the womb (rum) of rDo rje phag mo.

The Goddess and the Lake

gNam mtsho either embodies or harbors the deities she represents. In the case of gNam mtsho phyug mo, the lake is sometimes conceived of as the residence or palace of the goddess, and at other times it is tantamount to the goddess herself. In other words, the water of the lake is variously the medium or home of gNam mtsho phyug mo; or, the very goddess herself. The 'brog pa often ambiguously hold both views simultaneously (as is reflected in the *gNam mtsho phyug mo'i gsol mchod*). The tradition of the goddess immanent in the waters of the lake seems to indicate an early stage of religion, while tenure in the lake structurally points to a more modern stage in religious development.



rDo rje phag mo

gNam mtsho is host to rDo rje phag mo in a different way from that of her indigenous counterpart. Here the lake is a manifestation of the goddess, one of the many manifestations of rDo rje

phag mo in Tibet. In this case, gNam mtsho is far from the sum total of the goddess, but forms just one of her many visible imprints on the geography and religious culture of Tibet. gNam mtsho is synonymous with gNam mtsho phyug mo, but is only one of many topographs that is correlated with rDo rje phag mo, a deity with far-reaching connotations in Tibet and adjoining regions.

Ma rgyud

gNam mtsho is part of the territorial mandala of the Bon Ma rgyud (mother tantra), which consists of 24 sets of theriomorphic dakinis of five members each.[32] The mother tantra literature comprises the *Ma rgyud sangs rgyas rgyud gsum*, whose contents were first transmitted to Mi lus bsam legs.[33] Each quincunx of dakinis is associated with a different sacred site. These are primarily located in Tibet but are also found in Nepal, China and India, and form an integral part of the geographical dimension of the Bon mother tantra. It has been suggested that not all of these quincunxes have a geographical correlation; some are instead locus mentes. This view, however, is contradicted by sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, who asserts that all are part of a geographical mandala.

The *sGrub skor* of the *Ma rgyud sangs rgyas rgyud gsum* states that gNam mtsho embodies five naga-headed dakinis (gNam mtsho phyug mo'i mkha' 'gro klu gdong lnga). According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, the locations of the quincunx of naga-headed dakinis are: gNyan chen zil ngar (Nang do, the largest island in gNam mtsho)—center; Yar lha dpal phug (located north of gNam mtsho in the gNam ru district)—north; 'Phen yul tsa ri (in mTsho sna county)—south; Thang shing rgyal ba (located near Rwa sgreng dgon pa)—east; and Drum gyi stag tshal (located in gShen gyer, west of gNam mtsho)—west. On all but the southern side, this array of dakinis has a symmetry centered around gNam mtsho. In the south the symmetry is lost by the far-flung placement of this site near the northeastern border of Bhutan. The naga-headed dakinis of Nang do are centered in the kLu khang cave. The Buddhists consider this cave very sacred and ancient, although it has no Ma rgyud associations for them.

Geomantic power is also exuded by other Ma rgyud quincunx, such as the cave at g.Yu bun dgon pa, Dang ra g.yu mtsho, the center place of the carnivorous-faced dakinis; or the cave located on the middle of the east shore of Pad khud mtsho, the center spot for the boar-headed dakinis. As with other traditions connected with the Divine Dyads, a syncretism is perceptible in the Ma rgyud sites.

mTsho sman rgyal mo

An ancient deistic form of gNam mtsho known as mTsho sman rgyal mo is no longer popular and is nearly extinct in the region. Contacts with the 'brog pa revealed only three people who could verify that such a goddess is associated with gNam mtsho.[34]

The sman—a pre-Buddhist group of female deities—often form sisterhoods called

sman mched or sman spun. The name sman pertains to both medicine and women.[35] In the Tun-huang manuscripts related to divination there are numerous references to mu sman, mtsho sman and sman of the earth, sky and waters.[36] In the Imperial period, the sman were especially concerned with the fortunes of the royal family and ministers and they made predictions about their well-being or demise. In the Imperial period, the sman had mediums; for example, the mu sman spoke through an old woman. In the Lho brag inscription, tentatively dated to the early reign of Khri srong lde btsan, the expression lDe sman lde'u cung may refer to a spirit-medium. Generally speaking, the sman are the consorts of lha and specifically of the male members of the Divine Dyads.[37]

The sman are related to the fecundity of the land and the well-being of animals, people and even disembodied beings. This is proven by our examination of gNam mtsho, a sman mo. It is also true for the sman goddesses of the Dang ra mtsho sman mched lnga and of other lakes in Tibet, especially where the Bon tradition remains intact. The iconography of the sman reinforces their productive and sustaining role, which is demonstrated in attributes such as flowers, the milk pail, conch shell, gems and boxes full of treasures, and the arrow. Across the Byang thang the 'brog pa speak in terms of the viability of the land and environment-based activities being dependent on the sman of the lakes, be it mTsho ma pham, Dang ra g.yu mtsho, gNam mtsho or others. These goddesses characteristically have a dark and destructive side to their personality, reflecting the vagaries of nature, but fundamentally they are guarantors of the earth's procreative functions, and personify the earth's maternal and feminine qualities of fertility, regeneration and nurturing.

The sman are involved closely with well-being and health or medicine. Their name is most directly linked with sman defined as benefit, use or beneficence. Sman mo most essentially means benefactress, which is probably the primary etymology of the word. Women and the sman share the same qualities, which seems to explain their etymological link. Perhaps through time and philological diversification, sman also came to mean medicine by virtue of its connection with the feminine qualities of nurturer and healer. This contention is supported by the fact that in the Tun-huang manuscripts the sman deities are well represented but not sman pa (doctors)(Richardson 1987: 8,9).

mTsho sman rgyal mo of gNam mtsho is not the only queen of the sman, although she may be the most important.[38] Perhaps the best allusion to mTsho sman rgyal mo is found in the *Treasury of Good Sayings*, a history of Bon. sTong rgyung mthu chen, called the Scholar of Zhang zhung, who lived during the time of King sPu lde gung rgyal, achieved realization with the help of mTsho sman rgyal mo at gNam mtsho Do ring (Karmay: 48,49). There is little question that this refers to the lake goddess. gNam mtsho Do ring is surrounded by the lake on all sides, save for a narrow extension of land connecting it with the mainland. A mention of mTsho sman rgyal mo, which probably refers to gNam mtsho, is found in a list of dgra lha called Srid pa'i lha dgu, along with gNyan chen thang lha and other important deities (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 339).

dBal lcags mi mo lha

In the Bon text, *dBal phur nag po'i gter bdag drug gi bskul ba zhes* the goddess gNam mtsho is called gNam mtsho dbal lcags mi mo (gNam mtsho, the Iron-Colored Woman of the Utmost Wrath) and is said to have been blessed by gNam phyi gung rgyal. She is described as wearing golden ornaments on her head, having turquoise eyebrows and riding on a white deer.[39]

The word dbal is unique to Bon deities. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin, it has the import of tremendous power and extraordinary wrathfulness. The term dbal also denotes a class of Tibetan deities, the most notable of whom is dBal gsas rngam pa. According to oral histories collected at gNam mtsho, her mount, the deer, at some indeterminate time in the past was found at the lake. The deer, especially the white deer, is an animal of the highest status. There are legends of magical deer in ancient times which used to swim across gNam mtsho and frolic in the waters. These legends are known to Buddhist 'brog pa living near the lake. Thus the intimate link between gNam mtsho and deer is not exclusive to the Bon po, although they are the only ones who seem to have documented it in their evocations to the lake. The word lcags is an integral part of the form of gNam mtsho under consideration. It connotes that the deity is the color of iron. It may also indicate that she has the strength and utility of iron. The element iron is a characteristic of many Bon srid pa deities and might have been grafted on to ancient theogonies probably with the advent of the Iron Age in Tibet.[40]

The blessing (byin gyis brlabs) that gNam phyi gung rgyal bestowed on gNam mtsho was more than a benediction. It was recently pointed out that the term byin gyis rlabs in Tibetan tantra denotes the specific relationship between a deity and a practitioner, characterized by the deity empowering the practitioner (Huber: 42). In the early period of the introduction of Indian Buddhist concepts to Tibet, byin gyis rlabs was used in place of the Sanskrit word adhisthana, meaning authority, power, residence and abode (Huber: 41). In the present context, gNam mtsho was in fact empowered by gNam phyi gung rgyal. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, the term signifies a transformational process by which the goddess gNam mtsho is the recipient of the qualities and faculties of gNam phyi gung rgyal. Essentially, this process results in gNam mtsho embodying the qualities of the goddess who has empowered her.

Yum sras

According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin, the Yum sras tradition is directly related to gNam mtsho, as this deity manifests in the lake. Yum, also called Yum sras—referring to the mother deity and her spiritual sons—is one of many manifestations of Srid pa'i rgyal mo, a protector deity of the highest calibre. Along with Srid pa'i rgyal po herself and sGre bla ma, the consort of Ge khod, Yum sras is one of the three most important Bon po protectresses.[41]

Of the three different ritual texts of Yum sras, the shortest of these texts is *Yum sras bskul ba* (Invocation to Yum sras)[42], which contains an invocation to the deity and the names of Yum and her four spiritual sons and their mounts. Yum, who occupies the center position, is called Ma bdud nag mo; her mount is a black goose (so bya). Her sons and their mounts who form a circle around her are 1) Lha bdud snying phrom—a white horse; 2) kLu bdud thang lha—a black serpent; 3) Mi bdud 'byams pa—a lion; and 4) bTsan bdud hur pa—mount not recorded.

A more detailed description of these deities is found in the text *Yum sras lnga'i gtor bskong* (Sacrificial Cakes for the Satisfaction of the Five Yum sras).[43] This is the most wrathful of the Yum sras sadhanas and contains a great deal of violent and maledictory language. The text states that Yum sras surrendered to the deity dBal gsas rngam pa[44] and was bound by him to an oath to protect the Bon teachings in the first bskal pa (cosmic era)(no. 146). In the middle bskal pa, the Zhang zhung masters Hri pa gyer med, sTangs chen dmu tsha gyer med and Khod spungs dran pa nam mkha' made offerings to her. The mind (thugs) manifestation of Yum sras, called Ma bdud khro gnyer srid pa'i rgyal, is recorded as living in the fort of dGu khri stong shong, which is located at Khri rdus sdong tshogs (no. 147). Yum sras is also known as Khri bzhur (sic shor) gnyan gyi slod mo che, bDud mo ge shan me 'bar ma and sKye gro skos 'debs nad kyi bdag.

In front of Yum sras is Dregs pa lha rgod snying khrom, who is also known as Jo bo lha rgod thog pa btsan. He wears a head ornament of jewels, possesses the power of the g.yung drung and has a retinue of 100,000 beings of similar appearance (no. 148). He has the ability to determine the fate of living beings. On the right side of Yum sras is kLu bdud thang lha drag rtsal chen, who is also known as Zur phud lnga pa che, kLu'i rgyal po thod dkar rje and Thang lha yar bzhur gnyan gyi rje (no. 149). This deity has a retinue of 100,000 wrathful klu and gnyan attendants and is the source of leprosy (mdze) and cancer (lhog rgod). On the left of Yum sras is Mi bdud 'byams pa lda byad can, who is variously called 'Byams pa khrag mgo sgra bla'i mgon, bDud rje srog bdag mthu bo che and bDud kyi rgyal po drag rtsal chen (no. 149,150). In his train are 100,000 bdud and btsan. He is the holder of the life force of living beings (no. 150). Behind Yum sras is bTsan bdud hur pa drag rtsal chen, who is also known as Lha btsan rgyal po yang ne wer and bDud btsan rgyal po mthu bo che. His attendants are 100,000 btsan rgod (wild btsan); he is the source of violent death and afflictions caused by menacing spirits (gzer rgod). Yum sras's minor attendants include gter bdag and the sde brgyad, who also became Bon protectors (no. 151). The best source for iconographic information on Yum sras and her four spiritual sons is *Yum sras lnga yi gsol mchod* (Prayers and Offerings to the Five Yum sras), a bskul ba (invocational) text found in a collection including other protector deities.[45]

Yum sras is a Bon protector (Bon skyong). Her distinguishing features are that she resides in gNam mtsho, she is green in color, and has a black goose or chough mount. Although she presides over wrathful deities, she is classed as a pacific deity, attested to

by her attributes, which resemble those of a long life goddess or sman mo. Her appearance accords with the other goddesses of gNam mtsho and can be described as the 'iconography of the benefactress'. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, Nang do, the main island of gNam mtsho, represents the life bestowing bum pa carried by the goddess. Her lasso, consisting of two colors, is represented by the Nang and 'Dre rivers on the west side of the lake. Here we see a parallel of geographical embodiment with the iconography of rDo rje phag mo. This tradition also reflects the conceptual ambiguity between gNam mtsho as the residence of Yum sras and as the goddess herself.

One of her servant sons, kLu bdud gnyan chen thang lha, is gNyan chen thang lha by a slightly modified name. The variant names and iconography provided in the Yum sras text clearly corroborate his participation in the Yum sras lnga. In the Yum sras tradition he, like the other members, belongs at least partially to the bdud class of semi-divine beings, who are notorious for their wrathful and even malevolent ways. gNyan chen thang lha, like the other three mountains and Yum sras herself, had a bdud identity grafted on to him. This cult of the bdud, conferring the most wrathful aura imaginable on deities associated with natural features, bespeaks of a development in the religious traditions of the Byang thang which differed significantly from the more checkered demeanor of the earlier environmental deities.

kLu bdud gnyan chen thang lha lies to the right of Yum sras, which geographically corresponds to the south.[46] The pride of place, however, is given to Dregs pa lha rgod snying khrom or Lha bdud snying phrom, which, according to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, is the secret name of the mountain bSam gtan gangs bzang. The front, therefore, corresponds with the east. To the rear of Yum sras is bTsan bdud hur pa, who lives on a red mountain rich in iron called Dam can lcags rdo, located near the base of the Gu ling la; thus the rear corresponds with the western direction. To the left or north of Yum sras is Mi bdud 'byams pa, a secret Bon name for the mountain gNam ra, located on the Nag chu and A mdo county lines. Like their spiritual mother both Hur pa and Mi bdud were subdued by dBal gsas rngam pa and in their own right are important protectors. The important gzhi bdag of A mdo county, the sharply pointed red mountain, sKyungs ka (Chough), is inhabited by the Bon deity Bya nag dbang rgyal (Black Bird, King of Power). This deity is a servant of Mi bdud and is a vehicle for his entourage, which are depicted hanging off his feathers.

The manifestations of the four spiritual sons of Yum are aligned to diurnal cycles and are an excellent example of mimesis, the imitation of natural phenomena. Their ordinary or most benign forms are equated with the morning, a time frequently of brilliant light and calm weather on the Byang thang. This white or pacific phase is akin to the dkar phyogs kyi lha, all deities allied with virtue and beneficence. The Byang thang weather generally becomes more turbulent as the day advances, and the mountains often lose their early morning clarity. Late in the day closely corresponds with the more wrathful forms of the scions of Yum. Night—a time associated with dangerous beings and animals like 'dre mo and dred mo lurking in the countryside—has as its parallel the

midnight manifestation of Mi bdud 'byams pa, who has a demonic appearance. To accurately interpret texts on sacred geography it is essential to appreciate the environment they describe. The literature reflects the respect, awe and understanding the authors had for the land about which they were writing.

The four mountain-residing deities subsidiary to Yum sras have passed beyond the sphere of worldly existence and are high level protectors. Like the tradition of the bodhisattvas and gNyan chen thang lha or gNam mtsho and rDo rje phag mo, the Yum sras tradition elevates the mountain and lake to the level of religion with a complex doctrine and institutional infrastructure. In a complete reversal of Buddhist tradition, gNam mtsho is indisputably superior to gNyan chen thang lha, her spiritual son and servant. This is in full opposition to the tradition of Vishnu which establishes gNyan chen thang lha as the owner or master of gNam mtsho. In the Buddhist stereotype, the lake goddess sits demurely to the left of the mountain god as his consort. gNam mtsho as Yum sras is conspicuously in control of the major mountain deities that flank her on the four quadrants and, by extension, of all the mountain deities that surround her. She is the rgyal yum, the queen mother, to whom all other environment-based deities owe their allegiance. Her sons control and direct the klu, gnyan, dregs pa, gter bdag, btsan, in addition to the life-forces of incarnate beings. She, in turn, has dominion over her sons and all the other sde brgyad and gter bdag.

With extraordinary power and sovereignty, Yum sras rules over all corporeal and incorporeal beings inhabiting virtually the entire eastern third of the Byang thang. rDo rje phag mo, Kun tu bzang mo, mTsho sman rgyal mo and g.Yu bya gshog gcig allude to the maternal pre-eminence of gNam mtsho, but of all the contemporary traditions relating to gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha, it is Yum sras who best reflects a matriarchal sacred geography and the hierarchical superiority of the female element. However, the literary basis for the legendary primordial origins of Yum sras as Srid pa'i rgyal mo can at present only be traced back to the 12th century.

The Great Goddess

It is now appropriate to trace the theogony of Yum sras and dBal lcags mi mo lha back to its mythical roots in order to complete the discussion on the progenitive functions of gNam mtsho. In the *Srid pa'i mdzod phug*,[47] the king of existence, Srid pa sangs po 'bum khri, emerged from the heart of an egg, which appeared through the agency of the five causes.[48] His female counterpart in the legend is the progenitrix of gNam phyi gung rgyal, who appeared from a bubble containing a blue egg of light, which sprung up on the wind-blown surface of the primordial ocean.[49] Sangs po 'bum khri called her Chu lcam rgyal mo and they coupled, producing animals, birds and nine male offspring (srid pa pho dgu) and nine female offspring (srid pa mo dgu). Each of the sisters and brothers produced or self-manifested their own mates. Among the male offspring is Srid rje 'brang dkar, whose duty it is to ensure the continuation of the world. He has

nine sons called gNam gyi lha dgu, the primary ancestors of the dmu clan from whom gShen rab mi bo che descended, and nine daughters, the gNam gyi lha mo dgu. Another son of Chu lcam rgyal mo is sKos rje drang dkar, who begets eight sons and eight daughters, the gods and goddesses of the earth. A third son of Chu lcam rgyal mo is Phya rje ring dkar, who begets four daughters and four sons, the second son being the progenitor of the Tibetan kings. The fourth son of Sangs po 'bum khri and Chu lcam rgyal mo is gNyan rum gnam dkar, the ancestor of the mountain gods.[50]

The first and most important of the srid pa mo dgu is gNam phyi gung rgyal, who appears to be the mother of the sky-dwelling deities. The second daughter of Chu lcam rgyal mo is gNam sman dkar mo, a Bon guardian and gLing Ge sar's aunt. The third daughter is Mi mkhan ma mo; the fourth of the srid pa mo dgu is Za ma stag mo; the fifth Shed za na ma, the goddess of life who counts among her 12 offspring the pho lha, mo lha, sgra lha and zang lha; the sixth is bBal so mon mo; the seventh is Ya sha phyug mo, who rides a deer, and is the protector of livestock; the eighth is Phywa tshe'i rgyal mo, and the ninth is Lha mo dkar mo. Various human and non-human races of beings descended from these 18 offspring of Sangs po 'bum khri and Chu lcam rgyal mo.

Another important Bon cosmogonic myth relates how the union of Chu lcam rgyal mo, who presides over the order of the cosmos, and a consort, Lha rgod thog pa, gave rise to a matriarchal pantheon (Karmay 1983: 7-10). From their union 27 eggs were produced in three groups of nine. From the first two groups of nine eggs appeared two sets of theriomorphic goddesses, the gZe ma dgu and the Gyad ma dgu, who became Bon protectresses (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 312-314). From the last set of eggs, the Byin te dgu appeared from eight jewel eggs and one stone egg which gave rise to eight types of elemental deities and a demon respectively (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 313-315). The theme of the generative egg is an important one in the Bon cosmogonies.[51]

Yum sras holds a vase filled with ambrosia. This healing ambrosia of gNam phyi gung rgyal permeates all parts of her and the world (Karmay: 1972: 205). Like gNam mtsho phyug mo and Yum sras, she is a healing and bestowing goddess. As the mother of the sky-dwelling deities, gNam phyi gung rgyal gave birth to this important class of Bon deities. There is a legend that gShen rab mi bo che appeared from the womb of Ma gnam gyi gung rgyal (Haarh: 227), which indicates her importance to the Bon cosmogonic myths. In the Yang bsang lugs, the goddess Mo btsun gung rgyal (who is probably related to gNam phyi gung rgyal) is the progenitor of both the the'u brang and King gNya' khri btsan po (Haarh: 217,221,224,225,226; Tucci 1949: 733). It has been suggested that, because of the rarity of deities with gung names, their cosmogonic connotations plus the term's obsolete status, gung was part of a cosmo-theogonic system which was in decline by the time writing was introduced in Tibet in the 7th century (Haarh: 222).

gNam phyi gung rgyal and Yum sras both display gynarchic characteristics which appear to reflect socio-political realities prevalent in the distant past. In the *Sui Annals*, reference is made to the Empire of Eastern Women (Nü guo), which was ruled by a queen until the time of Hiuen Tsiang in the 7th century (Francke: 74).[52]

As we saw above, gNam phyi gung rgyal is considered either the daughter of Chu lcam rgyal mo or identical to her via Srid pa'i rgyal mo. In Bon, there is a tendency to confuse the primary goddesses—that is, Chu lcam rgyal mo, gNam phyi gung rgyal, Sa trig er sangs, Shes rab byams ma and Srid pai rgyal mo—when explicating cosmogonic principles. This is often rationalized by explaining that these goddesses originated from the same primordial void, a state of pre-existence. gNam mtsho, via her relationship with gNam phyi gung rgyal and Srid pa'i rgyal mo, is linked to the other primary goddesses, their propagative and protective function being the link that binds them. gNam mtsho is not the only member of the three major Divine Dyads of the Byang thang to have an association with gNam phyi gung rgyal, Dang ra g.yu mtsho does also. Another member, Gangs ti se, is said to be the abode of the goddess Srid pa'i sman, a form of gNam phyi gung rgyal (Tucci 1980: 216).

Although gNam phyi gung rgyal's connection with gNam mtsho is established in Bon literature, what was her relationship, if any, with gNam mtsho before the advent of writing? The most significant element discernable from the relationship between gNam mtsho and gNam phyi gung rgyal is that it reinforces the lake's role as a srid pa deity,[53] one responsible for the existence of other sentient beings. As we have seen, gNam mtsho is a primordial deity responsible for the existence of a host of elemental deities. In contemporary 'brog pa culture, gNam mtsho is still known by the appellation Yum chen (Great Mother) and rGyal yum (Queen Mother). gNam mtsho's contemporary role as a srid pa'i lha, protector and nurturer, makes her the personification of a great goddess figure.

The role of the great goddess figure in Buddhism is best preserved in the tradition of Tara (Wilson: 14-20). All of the functions of indigenous Tibetan mother goddesses are assimilated in her. For example, Tara is the savior of the three spheres of existence and the beings that inhabit them. She is the mother of all the buddhas and protectress from all harm. In her white form she is the fertile or motherly aspect of compassion and is the bestower of long life (Chogyam Trungpa: 60). dPal ldan lha mo also embodies many of the qualities of the great goddess, as noted in the description of her place in the traditions of gNam mtsho. Though the appearance, theology and culture of the great goddess could be altered, she was never eliminated.

The procreative function of gNam mtsho is reinforced in mythology surrounding the klu mo or female nagas. kLu and klu mo are said to live in gNam mtsho, and the dragon that gNam mtsho phyug mo rides bears some resemblance to this class of deities. In one cosmogony, the elements combine to form a golden turtle producing six nagas from six eggs, which form a queen naga who creates the world from her body (Stein: 246). The top of her head becomes the sky; her right eye, the moon; her left eye, the sun; her voice, thunder; her tongue, lightning, etc.[54] The *Deb ther dmar po* relates that until the time of King rGyal tu re long btsan, the mothers of the kings were klu mo and lha mo (Haarh: 120). The mother of Pe har is kLu mo dkar mo, who lives in mTsho ma pham,

has the head of a khyung and the body of a human (Haarh: 323). Giant klu mo are often thought to live in Tibetan lakes.[55]

The generative power of gNam mtsho and the beings associated with her is hinted at in ancient texts pertaining to the genealogies of the kings. In the *bShad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*, the origins of King gNya' khri btsan po are traced in an opposite direction, towards the yog or 'og lha, the divinities of the underworld (Haarh: 216,314,318). In the *sNar thang bKa' 'gyur* and also in the *dPa' bo gTsug lag*, King gNya' khri btsan po comes from the 'Od gsal lha, which include elemental deities like the lha, bdud, dmu, btsan, 'dre and srin (Haarh: 265,266). These references indicate that, at least in the earliest period of the Tibetan kings, they were as much descendants of the powers of the underworld as they were of the powers of the sky. gNam mtsho is one of the greatest havens for these beings and powers of the underworld who, most crucially, have a procreative function. Even to this day, deities like the 'dre, srin and klu are thought by the 'brog pa to be the source of other beings such as the sa bdag and yul lha.

The Marriages of gNam mtsho

gNam mtsho is one of the greatest symbols of the underworld, especially in terms of her salubrious and life-bestowing characteristics. Though potentially dangerous and malevolent, like her phalanx of underworld beings she is instrumental in the continuance of life, and this overshadows her sinister qualities. The references in Tibetan literature and folklore to progenitor deities who inhabit both the Gaian and Olympian worlds points to a universe composed of the reciprocal powers and qualities which are enshrined in the Divine Dyads. This is no more evident than in the mythic marriage of gNam mtsho to gNyan chen thang lha. This marriage is the seminal symbol of the holistic interrelationship between the divisions of natural phenomena; it is the strongest cultural expression of the joining together of the diverse mediums of land, sky and water into an organic whole.

The lha and klu are different species from different habitats with different sets of proclivities and characteristics. At the same time, they share an affinity with one another by being part of a unitary cosmos. The marriage of gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha is verification of this union. Through their conjugality, the srid gsum are securely and irrevocably united into a singular entity, namely the universe.

The role of gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho in the co-substantiality of the universe is articulated in what is arguably the oldest and most elegant myth still surviving. The disarming simplicity of this myth and the growing tendency to disregard it belie its exceptional importance. According to the 'brog pa, gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha married to make the world. So tenacious was this belief in the procreative facility of the Divine Dyad, that this myth survived many centuries of the superimposition of more sophisticated beliefs. Rather than trying ruthlessly to eradicate this belief, the Bon po and Buddhists adapted their doctrines to it and created a pantheon

of more advanced deities based on these autochthonous divinities and myths. The process of assimilation and cultural transformation is now nearly complete and the survival of the ancient substrate of beliefs hangs by a thread.

It must be made perfectly clear that the cosmogonic beliefs associated with the Divine Dyads are not an alternative to Bon and Buddhist doctrinal concepts but are an adjunct to them in the way that folklore and more sophisticated beliefs cohabit in many cultures. For instance, the advanced doctrinal belief that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence—a belief which forms a cornerstone of Tibetan Buddhist and Bon belief—is cherished by the residents of gNam mtsho. Also important is Indian chakravala cosmology, which traces the origins of the world to a primordial ocean and Mount Sumeru. These kinds of modern religious beliefs dominate but have not yet completely displaced the indigenous foundation myths.

The marriage of gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha is not a monogamous tradition. gNam mtsho has other mates leading to the crossbreeding of geographical features. One of these is with the flat-topped mountain sPo che, 20 kilometers northwest of gNam mtsho. This liaison enraged gNyan chen thang lha and he cut off sPo che's nose. This is why, according to the myth, the mountain has a flat top.[56]

Another legend told by the 'brog pa of the region recounts that in ancient times a huge row broke out between gNyan chen thang lha and rTa rgo rin po che after rTa rgo eloped with gNam mtsho phyug mo. Furious at this indignity, gNyan chen thang lha summoned Bra gu ngom ngan, the A pha hor ancestral hero, and requested his help. Bra gu ngom ngan hatched a plan to steal rTa rgo rin po che's horses to act as a diversion, so that gNyan chen thang lha could reclaim gNam mtsho. The ploy was successful and rTa rgo came to gNam mtsho to recover both the goddess and his horses. rTa rgo rin po che opened a salvo of arrows against Bra gu ngom ngan, who returned the fire in kind. The exchange continued for some time until, wearied beyond endurance, rTa rgo conceded defeat and returned home without his horses or gNam mtsho phyug mo.

These tales plainly show that the gNam mtsho, like gNyan chen thang lha, enjoyed intimate relations with other natural features. This polygamy has the effect of strengthening the bonds that make up the matrix of Byang thang sacred geography. It furthermore establishes that the Divine Dyads of the study share not only a religious kinship but a mythological one as well. This mythological link also extends to Gangs ti se and mTsho ma pham. The mythological continuity between the three main Dyads of the Byang thang provides ideational coherence for the gnas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum, the ancient tradition joining them.

dPa' mtsho, located 40 kilometers to the north of gNam mtsho, is said to be the maidservant of the holy lake (Ma 1991: 22). There is also a group of seven female yul lha associated with gNam mtsho, believed to be either her servants or daughters. These are the Se mo spun bdun or Se mo mched bdun. The theogony and orthography of them is uncertain. Their link with gNam mtsho, while generally agreed upon by the 'brog pa, is nebulous.[57]

In reference to the sacred geography of the region, the Se mo mched bdun is further evidence of the interconnection of natural features on the Byang thang and the axiality of the Dyads. Through intermarriage with various mountains, the lake's influence has extended well beyond her immediate borders. There is no reason to believe that this is a recent phenomenon; the nodular arrangement of the Dyads in spatial and conceptual notions of sacred geography on the Byang thang is almost certainly an ancient theme. This system of sacred geography stressed the unity of the Byang thang landscape and its myriad of topographical interconnections.

The Eighteen Headlands and the Eighteen Faces

One of the most elaborate sacred geographic traditions at gNam mtsho concerns the Nyin la do chen bcu brgyad (the Eighteen Great Sunlit Islets and Headlands) and the Srib la gdong chen bcu brgyad (the Eighteen Great Shady Faces). These 36 islands, rock faces and promontories surround gNam mtsho on all sides. There is also a tradition recorded by sTag lung rTse sprul of 13 Srib la gdong chen and 13 Nyin la do chen (sTag lung rtse sprul: 16), although this variation is not popular at gNam mtsho. The Srib la gdong chen are located on the flanks of the gNyan chen thang lha range overlooking the lake, with the exception of Hal po gdong. The inclusion of srib (shady/darkness) in their name undoubtedly relates to do their predominant northern exposure and the relative lack of sunlight they receive. gDong (face) which ordinarily denotes the visage of a person, animal or deity, in this context refers to the series of prows that run along the main axis of the mountain. The Nyin la do chen include one or all three islands of gNam mtsho and the series of capes and peninsulas that project out from the north and west shore lines of the lake.

The *gNam mtsho mtshan deb* as well as most local informants treat Srib la gdong chen and Nyin la do chen as a sacred geographical tradition centering around gNam mtsho, but in a few texts the Srib la gdong chen are treated as being subsidiary to gNyan chen thang lha. Whether this connection with the holy mountain solely represents a Buddhist adaptation of the tradition or was present in the indigenous tradition cannot be ascertained from the data available. In the description that follows, emphasis is laid on gNam mtsho as it is in local culture.

Each of these 36 natural features is associated with a deity or group of deities. This tradition, in its Buddhist form, stems from the rNying ma pa school which created a divine palace (gzhal yas) at each site in which these deities reside. Each of these 36 deities or groups of deities are usually well-known Buddhist divinities or deified religious figures, having nothing in common with the pre-Buddhist culture and religion of gNam mtsho. Though Buddhism eventually took root at gNam mtsho, the older tradition of deities associated with the Srib la gdong chen and Nyin la do chen was never entirely displaced. In the pre-Buddhist tradition, each of the Srib la gdong chen and Nyin la do chen was occupied by a deity belonging to the klu, gnyan, dmu and perhaps other

classes of semi-divine beings. At least three gsol kha texts have survived, which describe three of these more primitive deities. A search for others by the sngags pa of the north shore of gNam mtsho region did not bear fruit. If they still exist they are likely to be found in gShen gyer or sPo che, as these areas were not thoroughly searched. Bya do rin po che believes that all the Srib la gdong chen and Nyin la do chen at one time had incense songs composed in their honor. One of the three known gsol kha texts is examined here. The names of many of the pre-Buddhist deities of the Srib la gdong chen, and virtually all of those connected to the Nyin la do chen have been lost.[58]

It is commonly believed that the shady Srib la gdong chen are wrathful and the Nyin la do chen pacific, in line with their luminosity. This is all that has survived in reference to the differences between them. We know that 18 of them are in opposition to the other 18 in terms of comportment, color and geographical positioning. Numerically, both traditions of 13 or 18 members in each group reveals a Bon bias, since these are important Bon numbers. For example, the Bon cosmos sometimes is divided into 13 layers of heaven and 13 layers of earth, and the progenitors of all sentient beings are the srid pa 18 brothers and sisters. The 18 Srib la gdong chen and 18 Nyin la do chen, both numerically and in the manner of their opposition to one another, indicates that they originally had cosmographic and or cosmological significance.[59]

In aboriginal mythology, gNam mtsho in the form of Yum chen, the Great Mother, might have occupied the beginning point or center of the cosmos with the 36 Srib la gdong chen and Nyin la do chen being her offspring or modalities. Conceivably, she symbolized the origination of the cosmos which manifested in 36 circumjacent branches, fundamental divisions or by-products. Grammatically, in the context of the Srib la gdong chen and Nyin la do chen, 'la' is a postposition meaning 'on'. In the appellation, it denotes shade and sunlight on the faces and headlands respectively. Nevertheless, one must question if originally the word lha or bla wasn't meant instead, which would have created two groups of deities rather than just two groups of places.

In the Buddhist variant of the tradition, no effort was made to present the tradition holistically save that, collectively, the 36 sacred formations represent the 36 most important deities of the gNam mtsho gnas chen.[60] In the *Grub dbang gong ma'i byin gyis brlabs pa'i gnas chen* (gNam mtsho mtshan deb), a list is given of 18 Srib la gdong chen, 18 Nyin la do chen and the Buddhist deities or their status (gNam mtsho mtshan deb: 4-7).[61] A similar list is also found in the gnas bshad (guide) authored by sTag lung rtse sprul (sTag lung rtse sprul: 11-14).

	Name of formation	Name of resident deity or status
1)	Hal po gdong[62]	dGra lha 'dul dpa' bo and retinue
2)	Sog dkar gdong	Great masters
3)	rNgog nags gdong	The blessing of great ascetics
4)	Sribs ri rngog nag gdong	Rigs gsum mgon po[63]
5)	rDo sbal rus sbal gdong	Dam can skye bu bzang po (a protector)

6) rMa bya gdong	The Medicine Buddhas
7) Drod lung spang rgyan gdong	rGyal ba mi 'khrug mgon po (a Mahakala)
8) Ngar mo gdong	Gu ru mtshan brgyad (eight manifestations of Gu ru rin po che) and entourage
9) Lha mo gdong	Self-manifested image of rTa mgrin and rDo rje phag mo yab yum
10) Khyung nag gdong	Gu ru drag po and entourage (fierce manifestation of Gu ru rin po che)
11) gLang mo gdong	The 80 Mahasiddhas
12) Gong mo gdong	The Eight Bodhisattvas
13) rTis rwa gdong	rTa mgrin (Hayagriva) and retinue
14) 'Bri mo gdong	Lha mo nor rgyun ma (goddess of wealth) and retinue
15) g.Yag po gdong	'Dzam bha lha and retinue
16) sPyung mo gdong	Tshe dpag med (Amitayus) and retinue
17) Senge gdong	mKha' 'gro seng ge'i gdong (Lion faced dakini) and retinue
18) sPangs sbra gdong	gDugs dkar (form of sPyan ras gzigs with 1,000 arms)

The names of the 18 Nyin la do chen and the deities associated with them in the same text are provided below.

Name of formation	Name of resident deity
1) Do dmar	bKa' brgyud patriarchs and entourage
2) Rags ma do	The rJe 'pangs nyer lnga (25 disciples of Gu ru rin po che) and retinue
3) sMug po do	mTsho sman bstan ma bco gnyis
4) Rigs lnga do	rGyal ba rigs lnga (the five Dhyani Buddhas)
5) Mig rwa do	rDo rje kun grags ma
6) Nam mkha' do	Phags pa'i gnas chen brtan bcu drug (the 16 Arhats)
7) Tsi tsi ra do	Tshogs bdag gter gyi lha mo
8) g.Yang mo lug do	The Dakini of speech
9) Gag pa do	Sangs rgyas snang ba mtho yas (Amitabha)
10) Ngang pa do	sPyan ras gzigs and retinue
11) sLa nga do	Sangs rgyas so lnga (the 35 Confessional Buddhas) and retinue
12) bDud rtsi mchig do	Shes rab dpal mo
13) Bya khyung do	sGrub pa bka' rgyud yi dam
14) Nor bu do	rNam par rgyal ma (Vijaya)
15) g.Yu lo 'brug do	sGrol ma dkar ngon (Blue and White Taras) and retinue
16) Do spin do dmar	rDo rje g.yu sgron ma and retinue

17) Srin mo do	Sangs rgyas stong dang rtsa gnyis (1,022 Buddhas)
18) bKras shis do chen	Assembly of 2,800 lha

Although not universally agreed upon, the most authoritative list of the 18 Srib la gdong chen and 18 Nyin la do chen comes directly from local sources.[64] It is not unusual in the Tibetan tradition for the enumeration of deities and spellings to vary from source to source. Another reason that confusion exists in the constituent members is that alongside the 18 Nyin la do chen is a local tradition of 118 lesser do. However, no complete list of these minor ones seems to exist.

According to local sources, the Srib la gdong chen bco brgyad, arranged from east to west are: 1) Has po ri gdong; 2) Nyi ri so dkar gdong; 3) rKyang ri sdo nag gdong; 4) Sribs ri rngag nag gdong; 5) rDo sbal rus sbal gdong; 6) Drod bsag rma bya gdong; 7) Drod lung spang rgyan gdong; 8) Dred ngar mo gdong; 9) mGar lha mo gdong; 10) Khyung nag gdong; 11) sPe lud blang ma gdong; 12) Lug lung gung mo gdong; 13) rTis rwa gdong; 14) gDong chen g.yag po gdong; 15) gDong chung 'bri mo gdong; 16) 'Bri lam spyang mo gdong; 17) Gur chen senge gdong; and 18) sPangs spra gdong.

The 18 Nyin la do chen, arranged in order from east to west, are as follows: 1) southern lake shore—bKra shis do (Good luck Headland); 2) northern lake shore—Do dmar (Red Headland); 3) Do ring (Long Headland); 4) Sha do (Meat Headland); 5) Do khra (Falcon/Multicolored Headland); 6) sNying do (Heart Headland); 7) g.Yang do (Sheep/Fortune Headland); 8) rTa mchog ngang pa do (Excellent Horse-Goose Headland); 9) Khyi rgan gag pa do (Barking Old Dog Headland); 10) Ra mo do (She Goat Headland); 11) Lug do (Sheep Headland); 12) Nam mkha' sil yang do; 13) western lake shore—rMig rwa do; 14) Do skya (Grey Headland); 15) Rags mo do; 16) islands—Chig do; 17) gLang do (Ox Headland); and 18) Srin mo do.

Some of the names of the features recorded above hint at the kinds of pre-Buddhist deities they may have been associated with. We met a srin mo, srin po, khyung po, in addition to various kinds of animals. The only text available which provides a picture of the identity of one of these deities is entitled *sTag lung ma sprul rin po ches mdzad pa'i gro sag gi bsang bzhugs so.*[65] This Buddhist gsol kha text combines invocations to the deity rMu btsan nor bdag of Gro sag rma bya gdong with those addressed to gNyan chen thang lha and his retinue. The language and orientation of the text is Buddhist and rMu btsan nor bdag is assimilated with the Buddhist deity 'Dzam bha lha. Consequently, only traces of the pre-Buddhist tradition are discernible.

The text begins by stating that the gnas bdag of Gro sag rma bya gdong[66] is rMu btsan nor bdag (fol. 1v). Next, instructions for making a gtor ma offering to this deity are given. Three sacrificial cakes are placed on a clean tray. The central one is red, has two medallions of butter and a counter-clockwise spiral design. The gtor ma to the left is for the rmu[67] and the one on the right is for the klu and is decorated with a coiled snake design. The plate holding the three gtor ma is ringed by balls of dough alternating with thumb print (theb kyu) shaped pieces of dough. Offerings include tea, chang, dairy

products and phye mar (a preparation of rtsam pa and butter). After preparing the gtor ma, the officiant is instructed to meditate on his or her tutelary deity (yi dam). The gtor ma is to be consecrated using mudra and tantric mantras.

As a prelude to the invocation of the deities, the all-pervading emptiness and the dharmakaya are alluded to (fol. 2r) First, the sde brgyad are invoked, then the bodhisattva (sa brgyad pa), then dBang phyug dri za'i rgyal, then Lha chen zur phud and his beloved wife, gNam mtsho phyug mo, their retinue, bTsan rgod chen po (servant or general of gNyan chen thang lha) and, finally, the 18 gdong chen and their gzhi bdag. rMu btsan nor bdag reappears and is called by the Buddhist names dPal phyug rdo rje and sMug 'dzin (Holder of the Mongoose), and is described as ruby red in color, wearing a cuirass and helmet, and brandishing a bow and arrows (fol. 2v,3r). His deer-faced mount is fawn colored and moves between the three worlds (stong gsum). rMu btsan nor bdag is said to manifest as a blue-colored wolf and as an owl (fol. 3v). Next, rMu btsan nor bdag is asked to be faithful to sLob dpon rin po che, rGwa lo rin po che and sTag lung dar shes and to protect and maintain the country, grant long life, produce ample milk, permit medicinal plants to flourish and protect against wild animals, thieves, heavy snowfall, lightning, fire and floods. Finally, he is asked to support virtuous activity (fol. 4r).

Even though rMu btsan nor bdag has become assimilated with sMug 'dzin ('Dzam bha lha), he is related to three classes of indigenous deities—the dmu, btsan and klu, all of which we are acquainted with in relation to gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha. It can be inferred from the gsol kha of this deity and the traditions connected to the Divine Dyad that the other formations of the Srib la gdong chen and the Nyin la do chen were also associated with deities that belonged to the same or related classes of divinities.

In 'brog pa mythology, gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha created the world and the beings that live in it. In Bon, gNam mtsho is superior to gNyan chen thang lha, a reversal of the Buddhist order of precedence. Ancient matriarchal traditions are implied in the Bon primacy of gNam mtsho and allude to the lake as a great goddess figure. To this day gNam mtsho is accorded the utmost honor as the soul lake of the Tibetan nation and as a symbol of powerful Bon and Buddhist deities.

End Notes:

1. In China, the T'ien (Heaven), the lord of the spirit world, commander of natural phenomena, and head of the ancestral spirits can be traced back to the Chou dynasty and is equivalent to the Shang dynasty god Shang di (Allen: 66).
2. Gur chung rin po che, whose full name is bLo gros dpal byor bzang po, was born in 1927, and is the seventh sprul sku of Gur chung padma dgon pa, located on the southwest corner of gNam mtsho. The story presented here was recounted in its entirety to Bya do rin po che and, partially, in an interview with the author. Gur chung rin po che currently resides in south India. For more information on Gur chung rin po che and his dgon pa, see Chapter Five.
3. A written reference to this magical handprint, which is said to be visible on cloudless days, is found in the *gNam mtsho mtshan deb*, p. 13.
4. This rare manuscript was made available by Bya do rin po che, bsTan 'dzin byung gnas chen. The manuscript was brought out of Tibet in 1959 by the Treasurer of Bya do dgon pa, sKal bzang rgyal mtshan. Its authorship is uncertain, but Bya do rin po che believes it can be attributed to the fourth Bya do sprul sku, Chos 'phel rgya mtsho, who composed it for a gNam mtsho Year of the Sheep celebration. Chos 'phel rgya mtsho's lifetime overlapped that of the 13th Dalai Lama's. It is at least partly based on older traditions.
5. The 10 directions are related to the 10 pure lands or paradises of Vajrayana (dag pa'i zhing khams bcu). It implies a completeness or totality and in this context means that rivers enter gNam mtsho from all the holy directions.
6. Ut pal sngon po (blue poppy), a medicinal flower, is native to the gNam mtsho region.
7. Mi'am ci (literally: 'is it human') are generally equated with the Indian kinners, divine musicians, who are half-bird and half-human in appearance.
8. gZi is a very precious ancient agate or carnelian which underwent a process of manufacture to produce designs of lines or eyes, and, rarely anthropomorphic figures. For the archaeology of gzi see Chayet, p. 60; for a general description, Ebbinghouse and Winsten. gZi stones are occasionally found at gNyan chen thang lha by the 'brog pa. Legends are told of gzi being the larvae of klu which have been spotted swimming in springs covered over with ice.
9. The iconographic information provided in Text *Ka-26* and *Nga-53* of the Fifth Dalai Lama, as regards gNam mtsho rgyal mo, closely match one another. See *Ka-26*, fol. 4r; *Nga-53*, fol. 5r.
10. Under the name gNam mtsho phyug mo rang byung rgyal mo, sTag lung rtse sprul provides an iconographic description which closely matches the ones given by the Fifth Dalai Lama. See sTag lung rtse sprul, p. 15.
11. This particular iconographic data is found in the Bon bskong ba, *Ti se pom ra thang lha gsum gyi bsang bskong*, fol. 6v. Similar descriptions are found in the numerous variations of this text.
12. The Byang sman chen mo dgu found in a text attributed to rMa ston srol 'dzin (11th century) include the lakes gNam mtsho, Dang ra g.yu mtsho and mTsho ma pang. These nine lakes apparently are all located on the Byang thang and represent a Zhang zhung tradition. For a list of them, see Chapter Seven.

13. .In Tibetan art, dragons have become closely assimilated with the klu (cf. Newark Museum, vol. I: 40,41). Other deities which ride on dragons include the tshe ring mched lnga goddesses, gTal dkar 'gro bzang ma, Rahu, and gCer bu lag rdum, one of five planetary deities known as the Khol sa bdag lnga (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 260,261).
14. A famous dragon tale was relayed by Bya do rin po che, which occurred in the early years of this century. Due to thin cloud cover, a dragon became marooned at gNam mtsho, creating a disruption. Traders and shepherds could not pass near the northern lake shore, but instead had to make a long detour around it. The thin cloud cover was attributed to a series of inauspicious events that befell the country. The most dramatic sighting was made by the scholar bLo bzang bstan 'dzin around 60 years ago. bLo bzang bstan 'dzin, now around 80 years of age, lives in exile in Dharamsala and is a man with an impeccable reputation in the Tibetan community. In Tibet, he was a respected leader of 'Dam gzhung and the treasurer (phyag mdzod) for the late Thub bstan dge legs rab rgyas, better known as Lha btsun rin po che. Every year, the Tibetan government made an official offering to gNam mtsho to insure the well-being and prosperity of the country. One year, Lha btsun rin po che and bLo bzang bstan 'dzin were deputed on behalf of the government to conduct the ritual at the lake.

    This ritual entailed placing an offering vase full of precious substances on the lake shore while invocations to the goddess were made. At the end of the ceremony, the vase was thrown into the lake. As Lha btsun rin po che was intoning prayers, he noticed what looked like aquatic vegetation swaying in the water. The lama related this to the 'brog pa, who remarked that it was not vegetation but rather the scales of a dragon. After the completion of the ritual, the incredulous lama returned to his tent without giving the matter any more thought. A little while later there was a commotion in the vicinity of the lake. To his astonishment Lha bstun rin po che witnessed a dragon emerge from the lake, circle above it, and disappear back into the water in the distance. The dragon was seen by all in attendance.
15. For example, me long divination is associated with the deities Ge sar rgyal po, rDo rje g.yu sgron ma and the tshe ring mched lnga group (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 462,464). As an article connected with divination and the worship of deities, it is a kind of power object used to control various supernatural forces. The me long is an attribute of the goddesses mThing gi zhal bzang ma (tshe ring mched lnga), rDo rje khyung lung ma (related to the brtan ma) and gSang ba'i yum chen (consort of rMa chen spom ra)(Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 179,197,198,211). The me long is also an attribute of deities associated with Dang ra g.yu mtsho. For a dialectic perspective on the me long, see Dagyab Rinpoche, pp. 44-47.
16. The only literary reference found for this important local tradition is located in *Grub dbang gong ma'i byin gyis brlabs pa'i gnas chen (gNam mtsho mtshan deb)*, pp. 3-4. The deliberate under-emphasis of gNam mtsho's indigenous personality in the Buddhist literary tradition is in sharp contrast with the situation on the ground.
17. For citations on the Buddhist father of gNam mtsho, brGya byin, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 201,208; *Grub dbang gong ma'i byin gyis brlabs pa'i gnas chen*, p. 2.
18. Rang byung is an ancient, pervasive belief in Tibet, which is philosophically disparate from

the Buddhist doctrine of stong pa nyid (shunyata), although they are often confused. In the Buddhist stong pa nyid, stress is placed on the interdependent origination of phenomena and their absence of any inherent identity. The concept of rang byung, however, is more amenable to rDzogs chen philosophy, which posits phenomena springing from a primordial reality. The concept of rang byung is closely allied with that of ngo bo, a concept that explains natural phenomena in terms of existing independently from a power within. For example, a tree intrinsically appears from its seed as does a bird from its egg. In the same fashion, other natural phenomena are thought to arise from a potentiality that lies within.

19. In Bon, rDzogs chen, called the essence of Tibetan teachings, attributes its origins to gShen rab mi bo che, who allegedly taught it as the highest of the Nine Vehicles of Bon (cf. Norbu 1995: 30,232-234). The most important cycle of rDzogs chen teachings of the Supreme Vehicle (Yang rtse bla med theg pa) is the rDzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan brgyud (the Great Oral Transmission of the rDzogs chen of Zhang Zhung), regarded as an unbroken lineage beginning with the Primordial Buddha (Kun tu bzang po) himself (cf. Norbu 1995: 217,218). In the Buddhist tradition, the spiritual progenitor of rDzogs chen is also the Primordial Buddha and the first earthly master, dGa' rab rdo rje of O rgyan (Norbu 1995: 233,234). In Tibet, the great masters of the 8th century, Vairocana, Vimalamitra and Gu ru rin po che, were all instrumental in its propagation (Norbu 1995: 234). In rDzogs chen, the primordial basis (gzhi), the ultimate phenomenological ground of reality, is described as being like space (dbyings), because it is void-like, blank, solitary and unchanging (Snellgrove 1967: 231). All physical and mental phenomena which are nothing more than projections of dbyings spring forth from it, abide in it, and inevitably merge back into it. This view of the nature of reality is referred to as suchness (ji bzhin pa) in rDzogs chen philosophy.
20. For an iconographic and historical description of the goddess dPal ldan lha mo, see Tucci 1949, pp. 590-595; Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 22-38; Ladrang Kalsang, pp. 17-32.
21. This information was conveyed in personal communication by rGan rdo grags of Se ra phyes college.
22. gNam mtsho as rDo rje kun grags ma is found in texts belonging to or inspired by these sects, see Tag lung rin po che, p. 15; *gNam mtsho mtshan deb*, title page.
23. For a general description and various lists of the bstan ma bcu gnyis, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 181-198.
24. The colophon of this manuscript reads: "Composed very clearly by Ngag dbang rnam rgyal at bKra shis do in the meditation cave of Chos sku sangs rgyas yar byon called bDe drod rdzul sprul phug (the Miraculous Cave of Warmth and Happiness)." The text consists of eight folios written in dbu med script. The author of this text, Ngag dbang rnam rgyal, belonged to the Zhabs drung lineage, one of the three throne-holding lineages of the sTag lung sub-sect. The other two are rMa sprul and rTse sprul. This manuscript forms part of the chos skyong cycle of literature of the sTag lung pa which is headed by the deity dGe bsnyen nag po sprang btsan and is found as a unit with the four gNyan chen thang lha texts. This manuscript was kindly made available by rMa sprul rin po che, bsTan 'dzin kun bzang 'jigs

med, the 11th in his lineage.

25. She is the chief of the 12 brtan ma and carries out the tantric 'phrin las functions (four activities). Her essential nature is called Sher phyin ma (equivalent to Kun tu bzang mo or Chos sku yum chen mo). Her color is like the sky, and she is very beautiful and irresistible but wrathful towards sinners (fol. 3r). She wears a dbu rgyan (head ornament), snyan cha (earrings), mgul phreng (necklace) and phyag zhabs gdub bu (anklets and bracelets). Her priceless ornaments are very colorful and decorated with precious substances from the lha klu mi (beings of the three realms of existence). She wears lovely bright garlands of Mandha ra flowers and her hair is very dark. She displays a wisdom jewel on her forehead and she is attired in gorgeous, flowing divine robes (fol. 3v).

    In one hand she holds a chu srin rgyal mtshan, which she uses to drive away disturbances caused by the bdud. In the other hand she holds a silver mirror in which she can see the past, present and future (fol. 4r). Her chu srin rgyal mtshan is ornamented with a rdo rje and nor bu and with her silver mirror she reflects all phenomena and signals good omens (fol. 6r). Her voice can be heard through the three worlds (stong gsum), and she unleashes thunder, lightning and hail (fol. 4r). She hovers in the clouds of the sky riding a fierce dragon with a crest of fire. She is surrounded by Zur phud lnga pa, and the brtan ma, skyong ma (a class of indigenous protective deities closely related to the brtan ma) and yang ma (sic g.yang ma?). Her retinue is of unimaginable numbers and moves about instantaneously (fol. 4v).

26. The Fifth Dalai Lama's penchant for equating gNam mtsho phyug mo with rDo rje g.yu sgron ma is recorded in his writings. See Text *Ka-26*, fol. 4r; Text *Ka-24*, fol. 2r; Text *Nga-53*, fol. 5r.

27. rDo rje g.yu sgron ma, who is sometimes considered the head of the brtan ma, is depicted somewhat differently than rDo rje kun grags ma. She is said to be a beautiful white goddess, smiling and with a proud bearing, riding on a blue mule or resting on a seat of gems. Her attributes vary but may include a me long, divination arrow or vessel full of treasures. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 190.191.

28. Some Bon po equate Jo mo gangs dkar with the brtan ma goddess gSang dkar gnyan gyi sha med ma, whose secret name is Gangs rum sman gcig ma. Nevertheless, sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag reports that this brtan ma is usually associated with a mountain located about 20 kilometers northwest of Pad khud mtsho, in sKyid grong county. He adds that, due to the fluid constituency of this group of goddesses, there is no reason why Jo mo gangs dkar couldn't be a brtan ma in a tradition which has not been codified. Even as a brtan ma associated with gNam mtsho, Jo mo gangs dkar is strictly a mountain goddess.

29. bDe mchog belongs to the mother order of the highest yoga tantra (anuttaratantra), according to the New Translation School. The aim of mother tantra is the subjugation and eventual elimination of ego through the transmutation of passion. bDe mchog is a member of the Pad ma family—one of the five buddha families, whose principle is purified passion. It is characterized by the western direction and the lotus, symbol of compassion. bDe mchog's characteristic color is blue, the color of space, which is devoid of all qualities when it is

equated with the primordial state. He has 12 arms and four faces representing the other buddha families. His two main hands hold the vajra and bell, which symbolize nonduality, while his other hands hold an elephant skin shawl, a hooked knife, a trident, a hand,drum, a skull cup full of blood, lassos made from gut and a khatvanga, among other things. bDe mchog wears a garland of 52 human heads, a tiger skin shirt of the warrior loosened for copulation, jewel and bone ornaments, and a crescent moon in his topknot. He stands in the dance posture of a heruka. The ecstatic embrace between him and his consort rDo rje phag mo represents the union of the intelligence and energy aspects of the padma principle, and the union of the wisdom of samsara and nirvana. For an explication of bDe mchog, see Chogyam Trungpa, pp. 25,88.

30. Vajrayogini and Vajravarahi represent different aspects of the same deity and have a number of iconographic forms. Vajrayogini is the action aspect/essence of the deity realizing the inseparability of bliss and voidness, and Vajravarahi is the wisdom function of the deity, active in destroying confusion and ignorance symbolized by the pig emerging from her head (Kelsang Gyatso 1982: 243). rDo rje phag mo is the manifestation of the wisdom of all the buddhas, and bDe mchog is the manifestation of the bliss of all the buddhas (Kelsang Gyatso 1994: 242). Vajravarahi is unclothed but richly decorated with ornaments of bone and gold, including bands encircling her ankles, feet, wrists and neck. She dances on the prostrate body of delusion. She is an emanation of the dhyani buddha, Vairocana. Her mount is a human corpse; in addition to the chopper and skull cup, she may also hold a hook (cags kyu) and a noose (zhags pa). Vajrayogini stands on a solar disc which rests on a multicolored lotus, while her right foot presses into the breasts of Red Kalaratri (Dus mtsan dmar po), Ishvara's consort, and her left foot rests on the back of the head of the black Ishvara ('Jigs byed nag po). She is red in color, like a bskal pa destroying fire; and she stands in the midst of a great mass of gnostic flames that whirl in a counterclockwise direction and burn away all obstacles to enlightenment. She has a beautiful youthful form and her breasts produce the great joy of the wisdom of the inseparability bliss and emptiness. Vajrayogini gazes upwards at the pure land of Akanistha, symbolizing that she has attained this paradise and that it is also accessible to her followers. The long garland of 51 skulls she wears symbolizes the purification of the 51 impure factors. Alternatively, the garland numbering 50 skulls symbolizes the 50 purified winds represented by the 34 Sanskrit consonants and 16 vowels, whose source is Om A' Hum. For the iconography and symbolism of rDo rje phag mo, see Rhie and Thurman, p. 298; Bunce, pp. 595,596; Dhargyey, p. 18; and Kelsang Gyatso 1994, pp. 155-157.

31. Some of this data on the anthropomorphized gNam mtsho can be found in sTag lung rTse sprul, pp. 16,17; *gNam mtsho mtshan deb*, p. 3.

32. For an enumeration of the Bon Ma rgyud dakinis, see *Ma rgyud sangs rgyas rgyud sum skor*, composed by Mi lus bsam legs and discovered by the gter ston, Gu ru rNo rtse. Since the advent of Buddhism, the indigenous mKha' gro' ma and Indian dakinis have become assimilated. Dakinis in the Indian tradition were fierce goddesses in the retinue of Sri, while

the Tibetan mKha' 'gro ma (She Who Treads the Sky) are female divinities of both the wrathful and pacific type. There are both mkha' 'gro ma who have passed beyond worldly existence and those who have not. The animal-headed dakinis of Ma rgyud are led by the powerful tantric deity a manifestation of gShen rab mi bo che, Ma rgyud gsang mchog thar thug, who is situated in the center of the tantric mandala. Ma rgyud gsang mchog thar thug (Supreme Secret Mother of the Tantras, Attaining the Limit) is described as being in the typical posture of a yi dam, with his left leg bent and his right leg outstretched, and having 16 hands, each of the right ones with a skull cup containing blood and a fresh heart, and the left ones holding the blood of the eight classes of beings, seven heads, and a dark blue body with outstretched wings. There is also a pacific form of the deity known as mKha' 'gying dgar po. The chief of the Ma rgyud is depicted with his consort, Kye ma dmar mo or Kye ma 'od mtsho, and the 24 sets of dakinis arrayed around him. Together they symbolize the five directions, the five elements, the five aggregates, and the five wisdoms. See Namdak 1995, p. 157; Kvaerne 1995, p. 74.

33. The biography of Mi lus bsam legs (Human Body, Good Thought) contains a description of how this heroic figure harnessed supernatural powers and became the just ruler of his people. The archaic terminology and imagery in this account substantiates, at least in part, the Bon po claim that Ma rgyud was not derived from the Indian Vajrayana, rather it sprung up from Zhang zhung and long predates Buddhist tantricism in Tibet. What seems most plausible in reference to the origins of Ma rgyud is that it represents an assimilation of a pre-Buddhist religious tradition or traditions with the shakti pithas or Mahatirthas of Vajrayana. What constituted these hypothetical pre-Buddhist religious traditions remains a mystery. For a translation of the biography of Mi lus bsam legs, see Martin 1994.
34. These three, highly respected and educated clerics are sTag lung rTse sprul thub bstan rgyal mtshan; the rNying ma pa rdzogs chen pa of Do skya dgon pa; Lama Chos bdag; and the Bon scholar of 'Bri ru county, Nyi zla tshe dbang rin po che, all of whom have great familiarity with gNam mtsho. They explained that, in the distant past, mTsho sman rgyal mo was gNam mtsho, although they were unable to provide details. We have touched upon the sman in alternative names for gNam mtsho, including rDo rje sman btsun, sMan btsun gnam mtsho phyug mo, and sMan btsun g.yu lo phyug mo sil, all of which reflect the link between the lake and the sman.
35. sMan is the common word for medicine and medicinal compounds and sMan lha refers to the Medicine Buddha. sMan is also a honorific term for women.
36. For data on the sman in the Tun-huang manuscripts and in Imperial Tibet, see Richardson 1987, 8,9.
37. Tucci's theories on the sman can be summed up as follows: they might be the female of any class of elemental deity or demon; originally they may have been a kind of female shaman; they perhaps are identical with the ma mo; and the terms lcam and sman are equivalent (Tucci 1949: 721). There was a branch or cult of early Bon called sman bon which probably dealt with medicine or this class of deities, mentioned in conjunction with other types of

Bon (Tucci 1980: 230). The sman who were subdued by Gu ru rin po che dwell in lakes, the sky, virgin forests, green meadows and in the earth (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 199), always live in pristine environments. The tshe ring mched lnga are sometimes classed as sman mo goddesses and one of the three subdivisions of the bstan ma bcu gnyis is the sman mo chen mo bzhi (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 198,199). In the village of sPu in Khu nu, the senior most indigenous female deity is A pi sman (Grandmother sman). She was appointed by the local yul lha, dGra lha, to protect the irrigation system, the lifeblood of the village.

38. Other queens of the sman include mTsho sman rgyal mo mkha' 'gro'i gtso, mTsho sman ru phyug rgyal mo and mTsho sman klu yi rgyal mo of mTsho sngon po (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 200,201).
39. According to the rangeland expert Daniel Miller, the White Lipped Deer or Sikhimese Stag (Cervus elaphasus wallichi) is still found in 'Brong pa county, on the Byang thang and in the adjacent regions of Nepal of Lo Munthang and Dolpo. According to trekking expert Gary McCue, the related McNiels deer is still rarely found in the juniper forests of the Rwa sgreng region. Some 'brog pa report that in the last remaining deciduous scrub of gNam mtsho a family of musk deer survives. The larger species of deer probably disappeared from gNam mtsho through a combination of human-made and environmental factors. With the distinct cooling and drying of the climate which began around 3,000 years ago, fodder and trees as cover needed by the deer gradually disappeared from gNam mtsho, probably contributing to their extinction.
40. Iron as an attribute of deities seems to indicate a specific period in Tibetan cultural development. With the introduction of iron implements and weapons, the Iron Age on the Byang thang was unleashed. In time mythology caught up with this technological advance and incorporated it into the pantheon, patterns of belief and rituals. Iron became synonymous with power and strength as is indicated by its inclusion in the names and as an attribute of largely wrathful deities. The origins of deities such as dBal lcags mi mo cannot be dated, but the inclusion of iron in her name indicates that, at least with this appellation, her origins do not pre-date the advent of the Iron Age. The most important female cosmogonic deity (srid pa'i yum) is usually called Chu lcam rgyal mo (Queen of the Female Water) but she is also named Chu lcags rgyal mo (Queen of Metal Waters)(cf. Norbu 1995: 148,166). There is evidently no doctrinal explanation for this variation, although some Bon po who claim that, instead of lcags, the word chags (to be begotten/to spring up/to originate) is really intended.
41. The Bon po consider Srid pa'i rgyal mo to be the equivalent of gNam phyi gung rgyal, the difference between them being one of occupation. Through the guardian Srid pa'i rgyal mo and her emanation Yum sras, gNam mtsho is tantamount to gNam phyi gung rgyal, the primary female cosmogonic deity. Srid pai rgyal mo is also the equivalent of Chu lcam rgyal mo and Sa trig er sangs, the great mothers (yum chen) of all deities (cf. Karmay 1975: 197,200). Srid pa'i rgyal mo is one of the three main protectors of the Bon religion (the other two being Mi bdud 'byams ma khrag mgo and bTsan rgyal yang ni wer)(Karmay 1975: 200). Historically, she was introduced as a religious protector by gShen chen klu dga' (996-1035) and liturgical

texts devoted to her go back to the 12th century (Karmay 1975: 200). A common form of Srid pa'i rgyal mo has three heads and six arms, and rides a black mule surrounded by flames on a lake of blood (Namdak 1995: 155). Her attributes include a sword, dagger, mirror, skull cup and hook (Namdak 1995: 155). Her four main forms correspond with the tantric 'phrin las scheme, each distinguished by a different colored mule mount. A yak manifestation of Srid pai rgyal mo is called Mi dred ma (Namdak 1995: 155). Many dbal mo deities are considered emanations of her (Norbu 1995: 265). One of the most common sets of manifestations of Srid pa'i rgyal mo consists of six members, each with a different form and color and corresponding to a 24 hour day divided into six periods. These are featured in the important Bon 'cham (ritual dances) held during the Lo gsar festival in the first Tibetan lunar month called the Srid rgyal dus drug 'cham.

42. The *Yum sras bskul ba* was hidden at bSam yas by Li shu stag ring, according to the text. This text has been published in the *Bon skyong sgrub thabs bskang gsol bcas*, vol. I, nos. 594-596.
43. According to its colophon, the text *Yum sras lnga'i gtor bskong* was rediscovered by the gter ston, dPon gsas dByil ston khyung rgod rtsal (b. 1175) at Zang zang lha brag. This refers to a place in bZang bzang township, in Ngam ring county. Although historically this text can only be traced back to the 13th century, according to Bon tradition, it, like the other rediscovered works on Yum sras presented in this study, dates back to the Zhang zhung kingdom. The text has been published in *bsKang 'bum*, vol. 2, nos. 145-155. In the *bsKang 'bum*, a collection of propitiatory rites to tutelary and protector deities, neither compiler nor date of compilation are given suggesting that it was assembled gradually over the centuries (cf. Karmay 1977: 134).
44. dBal gsas rngam pa is one of the Pha rgyud (Father Tantra) deities, whose five main members comprise the wrathful gSas mkhar mchog lnga, which includes: 1) Phur ba—fierce god of the 'phrin las; 2) dBal gsas rngam pa—body; 3) Lha rgod thog pa—speech; 4) Khro bo gtso mchog mkha' 'gying—mind; and 5) dBal chen ge khod—good qualities (Kvaerne 1995: 75; Karmay 1975: 196-198). dBal gsas rgnam pa is the principal deity of the 'Phrul gshen (gShen of Magic Power), a ritual system designed to eliminate all kinds of negativities (Norbu 1995: 199-219,281).
45. This Yum sras manuscript is part of the four folio bskul ba text, *dBal gsas rngam pa'i sngags bsgrubs 'phrin las dbu phyogs bzhugs* a collection of invocations to protector deities. It was generously made available for inspection by sLo dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag. The text begins with a description of Yum sras, called Yum ma bdud srid rgyal. She is described as dark green in color, wearing a cloak of peacock feathers and riding a chough (Pyrrhocorrax pyrrhocorax). In her left hand, she holds a tshe bum and in her right hand, a red and white striped lasso. Yum sras is referred to as the protector of life, and in particular, controls the female aspect of existence. She can be rapidly summoned by devotees and can instantaneously destroy all obstacles and eliminate evil. In front of Yum sras is Lha rgod snying khrom bsam gtan gangs bzang, who wears a white cloak decorated with a turquoise collar and a tiger-skin hat. He holds a cymbal and drum in his hands which repel disturbances and clear

obstacles. In the morning, he manifests riding a white horse, displaying a white flag and summoning a divine army. At midday, he assumes the form of a Bon practitioner and wears a tiger-skin robe and a headgear with two horns on it. In the latter part of the day, he wears the black costume of the demons and in this form destroys the life-force of the demons.

On the right side of Yum is kLu bdud thang lha, who is depicted as having a white complexion, wearing a white robe, and a conch shell hat, and riding a white horse. In his right hand, he holds a spear with a flag attached to it used to summon the armies of the klu and gnyan, and in his left hand, he wields a weapon made of meteoric metal which he uses to beat the hearts of evil spirits. In the morning, he is attired like a god and he calls upon the lha and dri za; at midday, he manifests in the dress of the king of the klu and controls 100,000 klu; and in the latter part of the day, he wears the costume of the gnyan and dispatches servants to destroy demons. On the left side of Yum sras is Mi bdud byams pa, a dark form mounted on a lion, who wears a yak skin coat trimmed with black bear skin and a black turban. In his right hand, he brandishes an axe which he uses to decapitate enemies, and in his left hand, he holds a black banner used to alert an army of servants. In the night, his form is demon-like and he is a destroyer of demons; at midnight, he seizes the hearts of evil beings; and in the morning, he is red and btsan-like. He subdues many kinds of evil and is in charge of an army of 100,000 klu and bdud allies. He cuts up the flesh of demons and severs their life-forces.

To the rear of Yum sras is bTsan bdud hur pa, who is brown in color, possesses a dignified countenance, and is attired in a red striped robe and red turban with a quiver hanging from his side. In his right hand, he holds a spear with a flag attached to it which he employs to dispatch servants; and in his left hand, he grasps a red lasso, which he uses to strangle evil spirits. He is mounted on a brown horse with black hind quarters and can move across the world in a moment. In the morning, he assumes a divine form; at midday, he wears the costume of a king; in the afternoon, he is btsan—like; at night, demon—like; and at midnight, he dons the costume of a butcher. In the morning, bTsan bdud hur pa, who is ever obedient to his mother, reverts back to his ordinary form in order to help practitioners.

46. Lob dpon bsTan 'dzin nam bdag provided the geographical data on the Yum sras tradition recorded herein. The Yum sras ritual texts are mute on this subject. Consequently, only a practitioner with deep knowledge of the tradition, such as sLob dpon, is familiar with its geographical context.
47. For two English language sources on this cosmogony, see Karmay 1975, 191-194; Norbu 1995, 165-167.
48. For a description of this cosmogonic myth, see Karmay 1975, pp. 191-194; Norbu 1995, pp. 148,166,167.
49. The earliest reference in Chinese culture to a creatrix figure is that of the goddess Nu Küa in the *Ch'u Tz'u*, dating from the 4th century B.C.E. (Birrel: 33-35). She began as the greatest Chinese cosmogonic goddess but in the Han period she was degraded and paired with a male deity (Birrel: 164).

50. The other five srid pa pho dgu are Thum thum rnal med rje, sKyin dang ngar gyi rje, Ye mkhyen 'phrul gyi rgyal, Sa lha mgon 'bum rje and lJon phyug 'khor ba rje. Norbu 1995, p. 166.
51. While no legend of gNam mtsho or Dang ra g.yu mtsho directly born of eggs has been uncovered, other lakes are said to have originated in eggs. In the *Gangs Ti se'i dkar chag*, there is a legend concerning four great lakes in far western Tibet which hatched from four cosmic eggs that sprung from the void (Norbu and Prats: 111-113). These lakes and eggs are: 1) Ma pang g.yu mtsho—turquoise egg; 2) La ngag bsil mo mtsho—golden egg; 3) Gur rgyal lha mo mtsho—conch shell egg; and 4) Gong chu dngul mo mtsho—conch shell egg. In the La dwags version of the Epic, each of the four quarters of the world had its own origin-egg from which the guardians of the quarters appeared (Haarh: 162). The generative or cosmic egg is a mythologem known to people throughout inner Asia. Today, the generative egg is linked indirectly with gNam mtsho through her association with gNam phyi gung rgyal. In China, the theme of generative eggs is recorded in the 3rd century text, *Historical Records of the Three Sovereign Divinities and the Five Gods*. It has been suggested that this theme was inspired by Tibetan tradition. See Birrel, pp. 28,29.
52. In Chinese sources, there is mention of a woman ruler of Su-p'i, which might refer to the Sum pa clan of Zhang zhung (Beckwith 1984: 149,150). The Western Kingdom Suvarnagotra (Golden Race) or Strirajya (Land of Women) in Indian sources dominated by women, was known to Alexander the Great (Stein: 35). Chinese sources link the Eastern and Western Kingdoms of Women (Beckwith 1984: 148; Jay). The Eastern Land of Women, one of the two main groups of Tibeto-Burman Ch'iang groups, intermarried with the Sum pa, while it is thought that the Ch'iang came into contact with the Western Land of Women (Stein: 29-31). A study of Tang sources for the Eastern Kingdom of Women (Dong nü guo) reveals that their kingdom consisted of 80 towns with a population of 40,000, one fourth of which were soldiers. Women held dominant social and political roles in the autocracy and authority was matrifocal. Royal succession was matrilineal and the ruler's husband had no political responsibilities. Men were engaged in war and agriculture. Deities such as a tree god were worshipped, and prognostication and human sacrifice were carried out. The matriarchy came to an end after 742 and rule passed to men. For a description of pertinent Tang literature, see Jay. These historical references suggest that women dominated political life across the entire breadth of northern Tibet prior to the Imperial era. There is also evidence of ancient societies being dominated by women in Central Asia. For example, in the tombs of the Okunev culture (early second millennium B.C.E.), stelae were carved with female faces or the entire figure representing the goddess and ancestress of the tribe (Gryaznov: 63,64). By the time of the Karasuk culture (13th to 8th century B.C.E.), the matriarchal structure had declined and was being replaced by a patriarchal society (Gryaznov: 95). If such a gynarchy or matriarchy existed at the Divine Dyads sites, the seminal function attached to Yum sras and gNam phyi gung rgyal is understandable in historical terms.
53. According to a study of comparative linguistics, the existential proto-Sino-Tibetan *s-ri yields

the Tibetan srid among other linguistic variants. Sri as demons and deities and various Tibeto-Burman cognates are believed to be derived from the same root. Linguistic evidence from Tibeto-Burman and Chinese sources points to a two-fold origin of Sino-Tibetan deities, ancestral and celestial. See Benedict.

54. In the Tun-huang manuscripts, the origins of the Tibetan race are derived from the klu and youngest son of 'O lde gung rgyal, sNe khrom lag khra (Haarh: 258,259,261). In another tradition, the klu mo 'O de ring mo and 'O lde gung rgyal are connected with the origins of the human race (Haarh: 267,268). In the *kLu 'bum*, a cosmogonic sequence featuring an egg through various permutations of the elements and vapor produces a generative klu (Tucci 1949: 712). In Buryat, the pre-Buddhist Lord of the entire world, Bajan Xanga, came to be called a klu or sa bdag by the lamas (Tartar: 15).
55. For example, in Pad khud mtsho is the klu mo Chu bdag ting nam·mdzod 'dzin, who has the upper body of a woman and the lower body of a serpent. In her hands she holds a conch shell and lotus. Iconographic data on this deity is found in the 12-folio text *mKha' 'gro mtsho sman yul lha gtso 'khor gyi bskang 'ba* by gNam khang mtshal ming po, who was attached to gShen tshang dgon pa. A hand-copied segment of this manuscript was obtained at La sbug dgon pa, on Pad khud mtsho. mTsho sman klu'i rgyal mo resides in the largest lake of the Tibetan plateau, mTsho sngon po (Koko nor); she looks like a typical klu mo (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 201).
56. In a variation of the myth, sPo che was crippled by gNyan chen thang lha after gNam mtsho bore him an illegitimate son (Ma 1991: 16). Ever since this time, sPo che has been lying prostrate. The gashes he sustained in the attack are the valleys flanking him. Feeling profound remorse for his action, gNyan chen thang lha built 100 stupas and tapped 100 springs. The remains of the stupas are supposed to still be visible.
57. Se mo, if indeed this is the correct spelling, must refer to the Zhang zhung word for old woman. The Tibetan equivalent is rgan mo. More plausible is that the Zhang zhung word sad mo (lha mo) was originally intended. Alternatively, the seven female yul lha are sometimes called sras mo (daughter/princess), especially by those who claim them to be the seven daughters of gNam mtsho. While no confirmation locally could be obtained, there is also a possibility that originally these deities were called srin mo, the pre-Buddhist class of deities. If so, over time, the orthography of the name was altered to culturally distance the 'brog pa from their pre-Buddhist cults. Srin mo, sad mo, se mo and sras mo are pronounced almost identically in the A pa hor language.

    The seven Se mo sisters and their locations are: 1) rTa sgo se mo—settlements on north-east shore of gNam mtsho; 2) 'Brong gi se mo—Go sbug and Sems mtsho, north of gNam mtsho; 3) Du ru se mo—gNam ru county; 4) Gro gad se mo—A mdo county; 5) Thod se mo—Bya do dgon pa, gNam mtsho; 6) Se sdi se mo—location unknown; and 7) Bum 'dza' se mo—Nag chu county. One of the Se mo sisters is associated with Gro gad, the name of an important gzhi bdag mountain in A mdo county and rTa sgo, which refers to rTa rgo rin po che. Apparently, these are daughters of gNam mtsho sired by these mountains or are their

consorts, although could not be verified from the 'brog pa. Even the 'brog pa interviewed in settlements under the sphere of rTa sgo se mo, and who have rTa rgo rin po che as their clan deity, could not furnish specific information on the history of rTa sgo se mo. It can be concluded that the Se mo spun mched bdun represents a vestigal tradition of the ancient sacred geography of eastern and central Byang thang.

58. The other two are preserved in the *dkar chag* of sTag phu sprul sku, and are entitled *Sras mchog khyung ri smug po la gsol mchod bya tshul la* (Recited as an Offering to the Excellent Son, the Purple Khyung Mountain) and *gNyan sras sngags lha'i bka' sdod las phyed chen po jo bo rkyang ri mgag nag la gsol mchod bya tshul la* (Offering Made in the Manner of Magical Formulae to the Son of the gNyan, Jo bo rkyang ri mgag nag, the Great Deity of the Activity of Placid Speech)(see Chapter One end note 100).
59. It has often been speculated that the radical dualism found in cosmogonic traditions such as this one somehow has an Iranian influence. However, other than in medicine and the symbol of the lion, demonstrable links between Iranian and Tibetan culture are difficult to establish. Iranian terminology has not been documented in Tibetan mythology and, furthermore, the etiological principle is voidness or the state of nonexistence and not the cosmographic opposition of ancient Iran. Hypothetical Iranian influences, which comprise three different historical and cultural contexts, include Zurvanism, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. Dualism in cosmogonic myths is found throughout Eurasia and might best be considered utilizing an indigenous Tibetan model. For a discussion on this topic, see Kvaerne 1987. Manichaeism had entered China by the 8th century and was granted official sanction in 732. The Uighur Khan was converted to this religion in 732. For a historical review of the spread of Manichaeism in Eastern Turkestan and China, see Scott. An excellent exposition of possible Nestorian and Manichaeian influences in Tibet is found in Uray. For a discussion on the possible historical connection of three primary Bon deities with ancient Iranian religion, see Kuznetsov 1978,1981. Potentially, other Iranian cultural traits in Tibet include donkey-morphic traits found in rDol Bon legends and Bon sources. These are also found in descriptions of Dard kings of La dwags, sBal ti and Nub ra. In the *mNga' ris rgyal rabs* it records that the father of King Ye shes 'od, bKra shis mgon, wore a horned helmet called a dbu rmog khrom thog dkar ru which is reminiscent of an ancient Iranian symbol of authority. For a discussion of donkey-morphic traits and horned helmets see Vitali 1996, pp. 103, 161-164. Other potential vectors of Central Asian cultural influence on the basis of their proximity to Tibet might include the Sogdians and Tocharians.
60. The following are the names of the 26 formations in the shorter version of the Nyin la do chen and Srib la gdong chen (sTag lung rtse sprul: 16). The Srib la gdong chen bco gsum are: 1) Hal po gdong; 2) rKyang ri rngog nag gdong; 3) lCam mo mtshal zhur gdong; 4) Gur chen senge gdong; 5) mGar ba srin po gdong; 6) Lug long gur mo gdong; 7) 'Bri lam spyang mo gdong; 8) Nya ri sog dkar gdong; 9) Kong nga g.yang dkar gdong; 10) Gro sag rma bya gdong; 11) Gur chung spa ma gdong; 12) Chu dkar jog pa gdong; and 13) sPun lung sngags pa gdong. The Nyin la do chen bco brgyad are: 1) Do skya; 2) Do dmar; 3) sMin ra do; 4) Bya

do; 5) Nam mkha' do; 6) Ra do; 7) Lug do; 8) Khyin rgan gag pa do; 9) rTa mchog ngang pa do; 10) 'Khyil nyin do; 11) Zhwa do; 12) Do khra; and 13) Do ring. The only formation treated individually in sTag lung rtse sprul's account is mGar ba srin po gdong, which is said to have a rang byung image of the excellent and spirited horse of Khro bo rgyal po (Rudra)(sTag lung rtse sprul: 17). The description of this gnas chen includes the lake Thod dkar mtsho which is obscured by clouds. From its vivid blue waters, which are raised in the middle, a resplendent light issues forth.

61. In the *gNam mtsho mtshan deb*, stong and sdong are written instead of gdong. No other confirmation, oral or written, has been found for these spellings.
62. This headland is generally known by the name Has po ri gdong.
63. The rigs gsum mgon po are the three most important bodhisattvas in Tibet and in Himalayan regions: 'Jam dpal dbyangs (Manjushri), Phyag na rdo rje (Vajrapani) and sPyan ras gzigs (Avalokitesvara). The rigs gsum mgon po are an important theme in Tibetan sacred geography.
64. This list of Srib la gdong chen bcu brgyad and Nyin la do chen bcu brgyad was assembled and corroborated from a number of native sources, the most notable being Gur chung rin po che and Bya do rin po che. It remains open to amendment since full agreement was not reached on every name.
65. The text *sTag lung ma sprul rin po ches mdzed pa'i gro sag gi bsang bzhugs so* was obtained from a sngags pa at gNam mtsho. It contains a number of spelling errors, as the title indicates. According to the colophon, Sangs rgyas rdo rje of Drag pa dpal dga' kha po mtsho, located on the south side of gNam mtsho (mtsho srib), requested rMa sprul padma'i rig 'dzin kar ma tshe dbang to write the text on the 15th day of the fourth Tibetan month in the Wood Horse Year. Although the text has not been positively dated, it is believed to be no older than 1774.
66. Gro sas rma bya gdong is the same formation as Drod bsag rma bya gdong of the oral list.
67. rMu is a variant spelling for dmu, the pre-Buddhist class of celestial deities found in Bon texts. The spellings smu and mu are also known.

CHAPTER THREE

The Appeasement and Worship of gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha

Introduction

The 'brog pa laypeople and clerics use a range of strategies to placate and appease gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho, in order to obtain their blessings and empowerments (byin gyis brlabs). Offering of incense, often consisting of juniper, is an integral part of these rituals. Incense offering ceremonies (lha gsol/bsangs gsol/lha bsangs) are not confined to the local pastoralists but are made in far-reaching areas of Tibet as well. Every gsol kha and bskang ba (propitiatory and expiatory) text contains offering prayers which present gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho with incense, gtor ma or other gifts, in an attempt to incline them favorably towards the officiant.

An essential corollary to these prayers (gsol mchod) are praises and blandishments which are directed towards the mountain gods extolling their power and majesty. As we have seen, these often include iconographic details about gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho and their retinue within the homage. For example, the gsol kha *Padma dbang gi gter sung cho*[1] waxes enthusiastically about gNyan chen thang lha's heroic qualities (fol. 4r), and goes so far as to call him the 'Great Master of the Universe' (srid pa'i bdag po che)(fol. 7v). The gsol kha texts are often specific about the kinds of protection and boons the devotees hope gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho will bestow on them. These petitions are made in tandem with offerings and prayers.

A succinct example of the gsol kha genre of giving to the Divine Dyad and of expecting something in return is found in a text of four lines authored by Bya do rin po che in the late 1980s and grafted on to Gu ru rin po che's *'Dzam gling spyi bsangs:*[2]

> bDud rtsi gser skyems phye mar o' zho 'di.
>
> Bod khams skyong mdzad gnyan chen thang lha dang.
>
> gSang yum sman btsun gnam mtsho phyug mo sogs.
>
> 'Khor bcas la 'bul las bzhi'i dngos grup rtsol.
>
> (To the protector of the Tibetan realm, gNyan chen thang lha, and his secret consort gNam mtsho phyug mo of the sman btsun and their retinue, [I] respectfully offer libations of nectar, barley meal with cheese and butter, milk

and yogurt. Please grant [me] the four types of virtuous activities and worldly and spiritual attainments.)

gNyan chen thang lha as the Focus of Worship

bsKang ba texts more specifically address violations and transgressions perpetrated against the mountain. The 'brog pa believe, for instance, that excavating the ground, polluting water sources, not making offerings to him when livestock are sheared or when wool is collected, and the burning of plastic can evoke the ire of gNyan chen thang lha. Should these kinds of impious activities occur, the perpetrators are in grave danger of being harmed and must take action to avert misfortune. gNyan chen thang lha is customarily implicated in causing sickness, misfortune, social discord and even death. By carrying out expiatory rites such as bskang ba, the mountain deity can be appeased and equilibrium restored to the life of the transgressor.

These kinds of beliefs and rites are ancient and, in a rudimentary form, were part of aboriginal religion. Historically they can be traced directly back to the Bon tradition. Among the 'Nine Ways' (theg pa dgu) of Bon is the Way of the gShen of the Phenomenal Universe (sNang gshen theg pa), which is concerned with exorcisory, protective, ransom and apotropaic rites (see Norbu 1995; Snellgrove 1967). gNyan chen thang lha is also important in apotropaic functions, as the texts and oral testimonies attest. In a mdos ritual text by the Fifth Dalai Lama, gNyan chen thang lha and his retinue are said to be effective in removing obstacles and harm caused by klu, btsan, 'dre, gong po[3] and the black, apostate form of Pe har (Text *Ka-26*, fol. 16v,17r). 'Brog pa also claim that gNyan chen thang lha is a useful ally in warding off attack by wild animals. Protection from evil forces is a preoccupying concern for the 'brog pa and, therefore, these rites are of pre-eminent importance and are another factor contributing to the overall stature of gNyan chen thang lha.

This ritual structure for gaining the favor of gNyan chen thang lha derives from Bon and has been adapted to Buddhism. In particular, the custom of using incense is very ancient (Chapel: 3,4). According to tradition, in pre-Buddhist times there were 12 lores or sciences (Shes pa bcu gnyis) which constitute the oldest system of classification of the various types of Bon (Norbu 1995: 48,49). According to the text *Byams ma* and a text entitled the *History of Bon*, this system of classification was known to the first king of Tibet, gNya' khri btsan po (Norbu 1995: 48,49). One of these lores is the Bon of Exorcism, the Rites of Purification. In general, the elaborate rites included in this lore were held to cleanse the contamination of the deities of the pure regions (gtsang ris kyi lha) caused by the negative activities of humans, and involved two main means of purification: by incense (bsangs) and by lustral water (tshan)(Norbu 1995: 106,107). In a collection of rituals said to have come from Gu ru rin po che, the origin of bsangs is attributed to the sky, its mother being the lightning and its father the thunder (Norbu 1995: 110-112). Furthermore, its offspring are the snows of mount rTa rgo and the foam of mTsho ma

pang.[4]

Another way the 'brog pa honor gNyan chen thang lha is by erecting prayer flags (called wind horse/rlung rta) on their tents, shrines and at sacred places such as the summits of sNying ri and sNying do at gNam mtsho. Not only the prayer flags but also their rope tethers are a symbol of ritual devotion. In some cases, a special kind of rope is made from white sheep's wool with knots braided into it. The origins of this tradition may go back to the Ju thig, one of the oldest and most respected methods of divination used in Tibet, which involves the use of ropes and knots.[5]

In addition to tying new prayer flags onto tents and homes of the 'brog pa for household deities and the higher divinities, prayer flags are erected during Lo gsar for the yul sa lha, gNyan chen thang lha. It is believed that by doing so the holy mountain will reward their devotion with good weather, good luck and healthy livestock. Pilgrims to gNyan chen thang lha are also fond of hanging prayer flags for the mountain. It is written that the planting of prayer flags and fumigation are rituals conducted for a mountain divinity to "increase his fortune like a galloping horse" and to "expand his prosperity like the boiling over of milk" (Karmay 1993: 152). This colorful description of the empowering of sacred mountains elucidates a key principle regarding their benefaction: by serving their needs they will in turn look after the needs of human beings.

Prayer flags symbolize well-being and good fortune and the increase of these, as well as the Tibetan astrological tradition (cf. Karmay 1993: 151-153). They are also an instrument for attracting a protective force connected to an individual's bla and phywa[6] (Norbu 1995: 68). This protective force is called rlung rta, which gNyan chen thang lha possesses in unimaginable quantities and which can be accessed by individuals through the raising of prayer flags. It is a celestial force, which explains its affinity to mountains like gNyan chen thang lha. The dispensation or retraction of the rlung rta, a mechanism by which benefit or harm comes from the mountain, determines the fate of individuals. The rlung rta is a subtle energy that travels through space from the mountain to human beings. It has a direct bearing on the strength of an individual's srog.[7]

One of the most universal customs found in Tibet to venerate yul sa lha and other types of deities is the construction of cairns (la btsas/lha rtse). They are found throughout the gNyan chen thang lha region on high ground, alone or with prayer flag poles (dar lcog) embedded in them. They are erected as offerings and are added to by successive pilgrims and travellers. Sometimes, as in the case of the two-meter-tall cairn at Bra gu rta rwa on the north side of gNam mtsho, they are called lha tho, which literally means 'register of the lha'. Tho is often spelled mtho, meaning 'high', an innovation explained by the loftiness they are synonymous with (Stein: 204,206). Lha tho are related to spo btsas, which are constructed in the same fashion and are found on the rooftops of homes (Tucci 1966: 187).

Lha tho and la btsas are made to mark or register the power, beneficence and other

divine qualities of gNyan chen thang lha, and in doing so are thought to transfer the blessings inherent in these qualities to the builder. Like gNyan chen thang lha, lha tho and la btsas are metaphorically called castles (mkhar), because they house and protect special attributes of gNyan chen thang lha which are accessible to devotees. They are considered sacred by virtue of enshrining or acting as a support (rten) for these empowering qualities and, therefore, are a kind of projection of the mountain's personality. Lha tho are also called gsas mkhar, la tho dpa' mkhar and la rdzas (Stein: 206). On a more expansive level, the cairns represent the three spheres of existence (srid gsum) and are a microcosm of the world (Stein: 204).[8]

gNyan chen thang lha is honored by travellers when crossing passes in his range of mountains. The customary invocation addressed to him and the other deities is "kyi kyi swo swo". This invocation can stand alone or be integrated into other forms of worship including the erection of cairns and prayer flags.

On the south side of the lha brang complex of the sTag lung rdo rje gdan monastery (main seat of the sect) is a shrine called Thang lha'i lha mkhar. Its main components are a srog shing and bum pa. The white, almost two-meter-tall shrine was founded by rJe btsun bkra shis dpal, the second rMa sprul rin po che, after his encounter with the mountain god. In the adjacent protector chapel (btsan khang), the abridged single-folio gNyan chen thang lha offering text *Thang lha'i bsangs mchod bsdus pa* is read on a daily basis. At least once each summer and sometimes on other occasions as well, a much longer reading and ceremony is conducted at the monastery on behalf of the mountain god. On these occasions the various sTag lung texts dedicated to the Dyad are recited.

In pre-Communist Tibet, the Tibetan government sponsored an annual incense offering to gNyan chen thang lha called Thang gsol.[9] The Thang gsol was sponsored by the rTse phyag, an accounts office in the Po ta la, and was conducted by the monks of rNam rgyal grwa tshang. Its objective was to ensure the prosperity and welfare of the nation for the coming year. The ceremony took place at sNying ri at an elaborate shrine (rten mkhar) for gNyan chen thang lha which once stood there. Along with fragrant plant substances, precious materials were also burnt.

Another means used to entreat and worship gNyan chen thang lha is meditation (sgom). Perhaps the most common type is meditation on emptiness (stong pa nyid), where it is used as a prelude to the consecration of objects offered to the hallowed mountain. This meditation in the Buddhist tradition is always accompanied by an affirmation of the Mahayana view of the real nature of phenomena. This kind of Mahayana meditation is sometimes combined with a Vajrayana form of meditation. For instance, in a gsol kha text written by the Fifth Dalai Lama, a visualization of the tantric deity Hayagriva (rTa mgrin)[10] precedes requests for gNyan chen thang lha's protection and largesse (Text *Nga-53*). First, refuge is taken in the lama, yi dam and dakini, followed by confession and generation of bodhicitta (fol. 1v,2r). Then the meditator is instructed to visualize Hayagriva as a gigantic being standing on the bottom of the ocean, with his

head high up in the sky and his waist adorned with the sun and moon (fol. 2v). Continuing, the meditator visualizes Hayagriva decorated with jewels and garlands of skulls, and holding all forms with his right hand and resting his left hand on top of all activity. Hayagriva's throne is Ri rab lhun po, the world mountain. From the top of his head appears his central attribute, a neighing horse's head (fol. 3r). He is seen as the subduer of all beings, and his presence is accompanied by thunderous sounds.

After a dharani recitation, obeisance is paid to Gu ru rin po che, guru lamas and Hayagriva himself, and is then followed by a meditation on emptiness with outer, inner and secret dimensions (fol. 3r,3v). After the consecration of gtor ma (sacrificial cakes) and the visualization of gNyan chen thang lha, his palace and retinue (fol. 3v,4r,4v,5r,5v), the text returns to the Hayagriva sadhana (sgrub thabs). The text states that gNyan chen thang lha and his retinue have a lunar disk at their heart with a resplendent white letter 'A' in it, and that Hayagriva has a solar disc at his heart with a red letter 'Hri' in it (fol. 5v). The solar disc of Hayagriva has rays radiating from it which are hooked and are used to apprehend the wisdom mind (ye shes sems pa) of gNyan chen thang lha (fol. 6r). By performing this Hayagriva meditation, having satisfied all its prerequisites, the officiant is empowered to make offerings to gNyan chen thang lha and, finally, to request boons from him. As such, meditation is considered one of the most effective means of propitiating the holy mountain.

Another popular method used to worship gNyan chen thang lha is the making and offering of sacrificial objects called tshogs.[11] The kinds of objects and rituals offered vary considerably according to the inclination, material means and sect of the ritualist. A text by the Fifth Dalai Lama describes an most elaborate tshogs ritual which we can assume was practiced by the Fifth Dalai Lama himself.[12]

The offering described by the Fifth Dalai Lama is a complex ritual based on a most ancient theme—that of giving something to gNyan chen thang lha in order to receive something beneficial in return. A review of the tshogs offerings made to gNyan chen thang lha reveals that they include the types made to both pacific and wrathful deities, thus reflecting the dual nature of the mountain spirit's personality. Moreover, the variety of color and shape of the gtor ma indicates the complexity of the identity of gNyan chen thang lha. For example, the different colored gtor ma of the four quarters represent the 'phrin las aspects of the deity.

The variety of live animals and effigies of animals in the ritual are typical of those directed to yul lha, and illustrate gNyan chen thang lha's foremost role as a protector of people, animals and the land on which they live. The tshogs offering, once consecrated (rab gnas), is designed to serve as a temporary abode for gNyan chen thang lha, as well as his consort and retinue, making him accessible to the requests and desires of the officiants. Essentially, the array and character of ritual objects used in the offering model the kind of world gNyan chen thang lha is seen to live in.

Text *Ka-25* by the Fifth Dalai Lama contains details of a mdos ritual (fol. 4r,4v,5r,5v).[13]

The centerpiece of the ritual is a nam mkha', but rather than consisting of a thread cross, it is in the shape of a elaborate palace (fol. 4r) and sits on a base of four tiers. It is said that while looking like a palace outside, internally it really has the appearance of Ri rab lhun po (Mount Sumeru), the mountain at the center of the Buddhist universe. On the upper step, statues or other images of the subsidiary eight gnam lha are placed in addition to a whip, crystal rosary and printed mantras. On the second step, images of the sde brgyad are set up; on the third step, cards or some other kind of image of gNyan chen thang lha, gNam mtsho rgyal mo and gtor ma on the cardinal directions are placed; and on the fourth step 360 gtor ma representing the 360 members of gNyan chen thang lha's lha khor. Additional offerings for the mdos ritual include medicines, barley grains, rice, salt, fruit, dkar gsum, dngar gsum, among others. The text goes on to describe variations and elaborations of the mdos ritual.

The objects of the mdos ritual, onee consecrated, also function as a support for the temporary residence of gNyan chen thang lha, his consort and retinue. They are a symbolic reconstruction of the domain in which they live. The central axis of the mdos, called the life-principle wood (srog shing), represents a microcosm of the vertical axis of gNyan chen thang lha and is the modus operandi of the mdos. The soul or life-power of the mountain is concentrated in its central axis and, likewise, when it inhabits the mdos, an aspect of this energy is clustered in the srog shing of the nam mkha'. This becomes possible because through the magical transformation the nam mkha' of the ritual comes to mimic both the physical and noumenal natures of gNyan chen thang lha. The mdos were originally ancient Bon rituals connected with ransom rites, and were included in one of the 'Twelve Lores' (Shes pa can bcu gnyis) known as 'Gro shes glud gtong (Norbu 1995 : 77). Their object was to eliminate diseases, disturbances and threats to life caused by the lha srin sde brgyad and the 33 types of non-human beings (g.yen khams sum cu tsa gsum)(Norbu 1995: 77). The Bon po and Buddhists still commonly resort to the mdos rituals as protection against the elemental spirits.

The gtor ma text of sTag lung Ngag dbang bkra shis dpal begins with a salute to the officiant's lama and Vajrapani (fol. 1v). For the preparation of gtor ma a mantra for purification (Om I ta) and a mantra of cleansing (Om swa bha ha) are given. These are followed by invocations to the deity, and the visualization of gNyan chen thang lha and his retinue (fol. 1v-5r). Next follows a tantric empowerment (gsol ba'i dbang) in which much of the earlier descriptions of gNyan chen thang lha are repeated (fol. 5v-11r). Among the information provided in this section of the text is the fact that Vairocana administered an oath to the mountain (fol. 7v) and that gNyan chen thang lha paid his respects to the founder of the sect, sTag lung bkra shis dpal (fol. 9v). We also learn that the mountain conquers the klu and sa bdag (fol. 11v)

The next stage of the ritual is the offering of gifts to gNyan chen thang lha (fol. 12r-13r) which are believed essential if the mountain is to look favorably upon the officiant. Among the offerings are yaks, sheep and birds made from rice, an array of unnamed

weapons, gems, medicines, grains, clothes, a man, gods, wealth, food, beer, nectar, incense, phye mar, and the rin chen sna lnga. Notably, a lha'i lug (divine sheep) with a red face resembling a frog and decorated with cloth,[14] and a lha'i g.yag dkar po ornamented with butter and vermilion are offered to the mountain god. Many of the requests usually made of the deity which normally follow the offerings are omitted, probably because of the fragmentary nature of the text.

In Nepal, David Snellgrove obtained and translated in full an invocation to gNyan chen thang lha (Snellgrove 1957: 239-243). He observed that it had the character of ancient epic songs (sgrung tradition) and he believed it to constitute an old non-Buddhist prayer. Several especially colorful and archaic verses from the primary text of the sTag lung pa compiled by Ngag dbang bstan pa'i nyi ma (fol. 19r) are given below. They contain highly figurative similes which render translation difficult. They are all directed to gNyan chen thang lha. Though abstruse, they provide an excellent feeling for the ancient bard tradition (gsrung):

> Sri'u gso tsa nal,
> srid la nya bzung gyis.
> (In the dominion, nurture children [very carefully] like catching fish.)
>
> Gong gsum gong gsum nas,
> rkyang, khra, le'u tshe bzhing,
> la nye kyi li li.
> (From the highest heaven, the wild horse, falcon and benefactor of life circle like water filling a void.)
>
> sNe phreng sne phreng nas,
> ri khri sngo [sic sngon] chung,
> rgyug 'chong [sic mchong] gzhungs se zhungs [sic gzhungs].
> (From the innermost place, the ancient mind of the mountain is like the running and jumping of a torrent.)

In ancient times, it seems that gNyan chen thang lha was the object of animal sacrifice (dmar mchod). Preserved in an ancient manuscript concerning the death of King Khri srong lde btsan is a reference to the mountain's bloodthirsty proclivities (Chapel: 14,15). After the king's death, an argument ensued between two of his ministers, Zhang and Vairocana, as to which kinds of funerary rites should be held. Zhang favored Bon po rites, while Vairocana favored Buddhist rites. Vairocana arguing that Bon po rites were of no utility, cited the example of King Zing rje stag skya bo, who had to flee his kingdom despite immolating many sheep, cows and horses on behalf the deity, Thang lha yar lha (gNyan chen thang lha).[15]

Regarding the Byang thang, it is also possible that at the close of the long era of hunting and gathering and the introduction of pastoralism, animal sacrifice began to

play a part in the culture of the A pa hor. There is, however, no solid evidence to document that it did. The case for animal sacrifice on the Byang thang is apparently is no stronger than the ambiguous and somewhat prejudicial affirmations of Buddhist pastoralists, and includes little incontrovertible historical proof. The diverse rock art record of petroglyphs and paintings found all over the Byang thang, which reaches into prehistory, seems to be mute on the subject.[16]

gNam mtsho as the Focus of Worship

Like gNyan chen thang lha, gNam mtsho is the recipient of the worship and the devotion of the 'brog pa. Although, technically speaking, neither member of the Dyad is fit to be a Buddhist object of refuge, they serve the more pedestrian needs of the 'brog pa for worldly refuge (gNam mtsho is not as actively worshipped as gNyan chen thang lha, but she is still important in this regard). Incense and precious items are offered to gNam mtsho phyug mo to facilitate the fertility and fecundity of the land, livestock and people. These kinds of offerings are often made at the four Khrus sgo and may entail a fairly elaborate ritual. In the pre-modern period, as we have seen, the Tibetan government made annual offerings to her. She is also important in rituals for rain.

Generally, in tshogs and mdos rituals, gNam mtsho is worshipped in conjunction with her mate, gNyan chen thang lha, as we have seen in our review of the texts by the Fifth Dalai Lama. This is also often true of incense offerings. For example, in the *Ti se pom ra thang lha gsum gyi bsang bskong*, gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho are requested to accept incense offerings (fol. 6v). In Buddhist texts and ritual practices, gNam mtsho is treated as subsidiary to gNyan chen thang lha. There are exceptions, however, such as when the goddess is petitioned at the Khrus sgo and at other places specifically connected with her mythology. Prayers for rain frequently revolve around gNam mtsho and include the ritual use of her water and tshogs. She is most commonly worshipped by Bon po as Yum sras. This worship can include the making of oblations, tantric meditations and the recitation of her sadhanas. In a similar way, Buddhists worship her as rDo rje phag mo. In the *Bod khams skyong ba'i brtan ma rnams kyi gtso mo bdag nyid chen mo rdo rje kun grags ma'i mchod gtor*, gNam mtsho is worshipped as a brtan ma goddess.[17]

The most celebrated manner in which gNam mtsho is worshipped is the circumambulation (skor ba) of the lake. This approximately 350-kilometer-long pilgrimage requires 11 days or more to complete. Traditionally, it was undertaken when source rivers were low or frozen. Bridges over these rivers emptying into its west side of the lake have been completed recently, making circumambulation easier. Ideally, one should circumambulate both gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho, a journey of over 500 kilometers. Traditionally, the most auspicious time for pilgrimage to gNam mtsho is during the Year of the Sheep. One skor ba performed in this year is considered

equivalent to 13 in another year (sTag lung rtse sprul: 26). This contrasts with the other two major bDe mchog places of pilgrimage, Ti se and Tsa' ri, to which pilgrimages are held in the Year of the Horse and Year of the Monkey respectively. During the Year of the Sheep, pilgrims come to gNam mtsho to circumambulate the lake, make ablutions, perform prostrations, conduct rituals, say prayers, and meditate. Also in this year, a special mandala of bDe mchog yab yum is made at the sTag lung dgon pa in celebration (sTag lung rtse sprul: 26). Similarly, special celebrations are held in the three existing dgon pa at gNam mtsho in the Year of the Sheep, and were staged at Bya do dgon pa before its destruction in the Cultural Revolution.

As for the value of pilgrimage, it has been poignantly described by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama: " While pilgrimage is not a required act, many Tibetans set off on long journeys to particular places with the hope of creating virtue and gaining merit. A journey through wild, open lands can provide the inspiration and experiences that help shape the proper attitude and inner awareness to accomplish that end."(Teasdill). sTag lung rtse sprul notes that remote places such as gNam mtsho are ideal for Buddhist practice and one's defilements tend to decrease, which is why such places have always been sought out by meditators (sTag lung rtse sprul: 25). The specific benefits that come from meditation at gNam mtsho depend on the effort and diligence of the practitioner ranging from the avoidance of lower rebirths to the attainment of enlightenment.

gNam mtsho, like her mate, was the object of an annual government sponsored ceremony called mTsho rdzes (Riches for the Lake).[18] This ceremony was also sponsored by the Accounts Department in the Po ta la and officiated over by the monks of the rNam rgyal grwa tshang. Its purpose was to ensure the well-being of the people, the growth of crops and the fecundity of the nation's livestock. It took place after the great break-up of the winter ice-mass and was considered to be more auspicious if it coincided with Sa ga zla ba (Buddha Purnima). The offering centered around a vase (bum pa) made of silver or copper, which was filled with precious substances including rin chen sna lnga, and specially sealed with a resin called spo tshis. Prayers were read and incense burnt before the vase was thrown in a deep part of the lake as a gift for the goddess.

End Notes:

1. This is only one of many examples of the complimentary language used in such texts. However, the semantics and content of these panegyrics involved with gsol kha and bskang ba texts is beyond the scope of this study. These praises are composed and recited for the purpose of glorifying the deity in order to make it befriend or serve the officiant.
2. The grafting of new material onto an existing text is commonplace in the gsol kha genre of literature. This allows various compositions to circulate freely among the various sects of Buddhism. In this case, the *'Dzam gling spyi bsangs*, by virtue of having been amended, now belongs to the Bya do monastic tradition as well as to its original owners. Sectarianism is scarcely a problem with regard to the traditions of the sacred mountains and lakes, because they belong equally to all Tibetans. The gsol kha genre is by and large a pan-Tibetan religious and cultural legacy.
3. The gong po are a class of spirits who display demonic tendencies such as causing diseases. They appear to be closely related to the rgyal po. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 284-286.
4. In this context, rTa sgo with mTsho ma pang may refer to Mount Ti se instead of rTa sgo rin po che. According to sLo dpon bstan 'dzin rnam dag, this is because rTa sgo, more correctly spelled rTa rgo in the Zhang zhung language, means 'snow mountain' and could conceivably describe any sacred snow peak.
5. For information on the Ju thig see Norbu 1995, pp. 189-198; Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 461.
6. Phywa is one of the 33 classes of non-human beings in Bon literature. It also signifies the base of g.yang (prosperity, fortune and glory), the vital capacity of an individual which controls his or her destiny. Furthermore, phywa is one of the four 'Bon of Cause' (rGyu'i Bon) and one of the Bon Shes pa bcu gnyis. Phywa Bon is concerned with the rites of prosperity and divination. See Norbu 1995, pp. 63-77,247,252.
7. The five animals of the prayer flag symbolize the transformation of the five elements, by which a person's fortune changes (Norbu 1995: 69). In earlier times, prayer flags were evidently known as klung rta (Norbu 1995: 69,249), klung here standing for the 'universal foundation' or 'omni-pervasiveness' (Norbu 1995: 68,69), or perhaps the Chinese word for dragon (Karmay 1993: 150-151). Omni-pervasiveness is an attribute of the Universal Foundation (sPyi gzhi), a rDzogs chen term denoting the primordial basis. In the Supreme Vehicle of Bon (bLa med theg pa), it is described as the natural state, void or state of knowledge; no attribute, physical or metaphysical, applies to it; it has neither color, form or shape; it is without beginning or end and is unconditioned by either bad or good. See Snellgrove 1967, p. 229. The significance of rta, meaning horse, is that of the rta mchog (most excellent horse), an ancient mythical animal that travels at the highest speeds. A winged horse is often depicted in the middle of a prayer flag. This is the personification of the rlung rta which also symbolizes the elements and the soul (bla)(Karmay 1993: 153). The word rlung is usually defined as wind. The ancient character of prayer flags is typified by the four animals depicted on its corners. Until the 13th century they were the yak, tiger, dragon and the khyung, but subsequently the yak was replaced by the lion (Karmay 1993: 153). These

four animals which represent warrior and proto-clan deities were known in ancient times as dgra bla or sgra bla (Karmay 1993: 154-156). The four animals of the rlung rta recur in other ritual activities carried out at Lo gsar by the 'brog pa. In gNam ru county, on the 29th day of the 12th Tibetan month, the four dgra lha are drawn along with the sun, moon and stars to usher in prosperity and long life in the coming year (Lha bu g.yang 'brug and bLo bzang bstan pa: 48). Also in gNam ru, on the first day of Lo gsar, a sheep's head and butter sculptures of a horse, yak, goat and sheep are placed on the family's altar. These butter sculptures are put in a sacred space called g.yang gi rwa ba sgo bzhi (the corral of prosperity with four gates) and are made to ensure happiness and prosperity. See Lha bu g.yang 'brug and bLo bzang bstan pa, p. 49.

8. A good example of these cairns can be found on the summit of the sNying do headland. Built in honor of gNyan chen thang lha, the cairn consists of a pile of grayish stones with boughs of juniper embedded into it. Resting on top of the la btsas are several mani stones, yak horns and pieces of white quartz, along with a few articles of clothing. Fixed into the cairn is a short prayer flag mast (dar lcog) made of juniper with hand-braided ropes suspended from it in a circular pattern. The ropes have tufts of wool emerging from knots braided into them and a few prayer flags are affixed to the ropes. A Bon po incense ritual quoted by the divine madman 'Brug pa kun legs says that when the world was created, a la rdzas was built on a white glacier and became the lam tho of man's 'go ba'i lha lnga (Stein: 208). Cairns are the most rudimentary ritual structures found in Tibet which, along with their close association with environment-based divinities, underscores their primitive origins.
9. This information on the Thang gsol was furnished by bLo bzang bstan 'dzin in personal communication.
10. Hayagriva (rTa mgrin), the 'Horse Necked One', is an important yi dam, especially for the rNying ma pa sect. He is one of the 10 wrathful protectors of the 10 directions (khro bo bcu) found in the Guhyasamaja tantra. His main attributes are a vajra, mace, sword and lasso, and he is dark reddish brown. On his head he wears a diadem of skulls and from his dishevelled hair protrudes a horse's head whose neighing frightens away demons and pierces all delusions. He is a terrifying form of Avalokiteshavara, the archetype of fierce compassion. He has many forms, including one-faced, two-armed and two-legged form of yogis and a multi-armed, -headed and -legged form popular among horse dealers. He has a scowling face, large belly, three glaring eyes, roaring mouth and wears the skins of a lion and elephant. See Getty, pp. 162,163; Rhie and Thurman, pp. 189,190.
11. For a general discussion of the philosophy, methodology, implementation and benefits of offering rituals in Tibetan Buddhism, see Makransky.
12. The text under review is entitled *rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi bsnyen sgrub bskang mdos kyi lag len dran pa'i gsol 'debs* (Entreaties to Recall the Realization Practice of the Powerful Blazing Vajra and Offerings Made for His Satisfaction). It is number 25 of volume Ka of the Fifth Dalai Lama's gSung nang ma series of his *gSung 'bum dkar chag*. It consists of six folios. The colophon informs us that the scribe was Manju gho sha ki'rti. Interestingly, the *Autobiography of the*

Fifth Dalai Lama recounts an elaborate religious ceremony held at a shrine for gNyan chen thang lha during which a rainbow simultaneously appeared and enveloped the mountain. The sunrise occurred at this moment and it was seen as a very good omen. The Fifth Dalai Lama then composed a number of prayers and hung a string of five different colored prayer flags imprinted with his zhal byang (probably the element and animal of his birth year). See p. 386.

The complex ritual begins with instructions to select a clean place and to burn incense there (fol. 1v). Then the altar has to be arranged in a particular manner and sequence. Firstly, supports (rten) have to be erected, which must include statues (sku 'dra) or paintings (thang ka) of the Rin chen sna gsum (Triple Jewel—Buddha, Dharma and Sangha), Gu ru rin po che and optionally, images of Vajrapani and Vajrakilaya. The main gtor ma is placed in the center of the upper tier of the altar, resting on a stand and built to resemble the palace of gNyan chen thang lha. The entrance is decorated with nor bu designs and a white parasol is suspended over the palace. The text states that this gtor ma is a maximum of one cubit in height and a minimum in height of the equivalent of the distance between an extended thumb and forefinger. On the right side of this gtor ma, a vessel full of nectar is placed, and on the left side a vessel of blood (rakta), as well as offerings of flowers, water and incense placed in bowls.

Rakta is blood, and in this context, blood products specially prepared for religious ceremonies. It is obtained from animals that die of natural causes and is dried and compounded with herbs so that it can be stored for long periods of time and used when necessary.

In the rear of the lower tier of the altar, which is covered by a clean white cloth, are placed a divination arrow (mda' dar) with five different colored ribbons attached to it, a victory banner (rgyal mtshan), and a decorative hanging banner ('phan chung)(fol. 2r). In the middle of the lower tier of the altar a parasol is erected. Beneath it an image of gNyan chen thang lha is set and on either side of it a crystal rosary and horse whip are placed (fol. 2r). The horse whip, crystal rosary and image symbolize the speech, mind and body of gNyan chen thang lha respectively. To the back, left and front of these objects are vessels containing spring water, water from a rocky mountain and glacial water (fol. 2r).

Returning to the upper part of the altar, the text prescribes the arrangement and design of a series of gtor ma (fol. 2v). In front of the main gtor ma, a triangular gtor ma 12 fingers tall and surmounted by the likeness of a sheep is placed, representing gNyan chen thang lha. Next to it is a round gtor ma representing his consort (yum), rDo rje g.yu sgron ma. On the east side of the main gtor ma, a round white gtor ma is set; on the west side, a round red gtor ma; on the north side, a triangular black gtor ma; and on the south side, a square yellow gtor ma. In between the cardinal directions, one larger round gtor ma and two smaller gtor ma are placed. Around all of these sacrificial cakes, 360 smaller gtor ma, decorated with a red design resembling meat (dmar thig) are set in a circle. A bowl containing 400 pieces of dough with thumbprints impressed in them (mtheb skye) is arrayed beside these offerings. The text then mentions a special kind of gtor ma with a sheep head design, as well as ones

that are thrown away. These are disposed of in the morning, afternoon, evening and at night.

The text then lists the ingredients of the gtor ma (fol. 2v). They are milk, yogurt and butter (dkar gsum); honey, white sugar and jaggery (mngar gsum); bamboo manna, cloves, cardamom, nutmeg, saffron and ammonium subulatum (bzang drug); sandalwood, camphor, nectar and the medicine of nagas. Additional offerings of chang, milk, butter, sugar, a rtsam pa preparation (phye mar), black tea, water, flowers, incense, fire, perfume and eatables in crystal bowls should also embellish the altar (fol. 2v). Also necessary are butter sculptures of a sheep, falcon, wolf, mdzo (hybrid yak) and yak (fol. 3r). Further offerings are arranged on another table. These include jewelry of various colors, gold, silver, a block of tea, brocade, cotton cloth, cloth in five colors, mutton, a full tiger pelt, a large arrow, a military helmet and armor, and libations (gser skyems). The tshogs offerings also include a contingent of musicians playing large cymbals (sbub), small cymbals (sil), drum (rnga), long horn (dung chen), clarinet (rgya gling) and conch (dung dkar). Furthermore, the text stipulates that a number of live offerings of animals are made (fol. 3v). These are to include three horses, sheep, yaks and falcons decorated with bells and ribbons of five colors.

13. For a general description of mdos rituals see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 369-397.
14. The sGyi ri mda' pa rus pa, which is connected to the Zangs dkar royal family, have Mahakala as their pha lha or family god. This deity is invoked on New Year's Eve, and at the time of sowing and harvesting. The lay people believe that Mahakala and the leading ram of the family's flock are one being. At the harvest ceremony this ram is petitioned to bring prosperity to the family and its livestock, and to avert misfortune. At this time the ram is led around the house, given people's food and addressed respectfully. See Dargyay. An early Bon po funerary ritual records the skyibs lug, a funerary ram found in front of some royal tombs. During the soul ransom ceremony the skyibs lug was covered in white bark copiously coated in butter. Its horns were wrapped with gold and silver material, its knee sockets filled with turquoise and it had iron hoofs. See Lalou, pp. 17-19.
15. There are a number of literary references to animal and even human sacrifices in ancient Tibet. Examples which follow illustrate the probable pervasiveness of this custom, at least among certain religious traditions at certain times. According to the manuscript cited in the main body of the text, the Zhang zhung King gNya' khur Lag mig and the rulers of sNubs, 'A zha and mChim Dwags po all carried out bloody sacrifices (Chapel: 15,16). In the Sui shu and Pei Shih—two officially-sanctioned Chinese histories completed during the Sui dynasty—details of animal sacrifice in Tibet are given (Beckwith 1984: 107). These state that when someone dies, cattle are slaughtered and a feast accompanies the burial. One year later, up to several dozen horses are sacrificed. Many references to animal sacrifice are cited in an early Bon funerary ritual found in the Tun-huang manuscripts (Lalou: 10-12,15,17-20). Priests called Kha gcan sacrificed yaks, sheep and horses which served a number of special functions in royal funerals. Afterwards, the hides were presented and a great gtor ma made, followed by the offering of the meat, bones and juices. During the soul ransom ritual of a female of noble rank, female animals were sacrificed. In the funerals of commoners, a small gtor ma

was made and 12 animals were sacrificed, beginning with horses and yaks. Mi la ras pa mentioned that the Bon po cured illness by offering a yak to the pho lha, a sheep to the dgra lha and a goat to the srog lha by sacrificing them (Stein: 239). The *Tang annals* (T'ang shu) record annual and triennial oaths of fealty between the bTsan po and his ministers and subjects which involved the sacrifice of animals (Haarh: 341,342).

The biography of Ye shes mtsho rgyal gives an account of an animal sacrifice carried out by various Bon po in honor of King Khri srong lde btsan called 'The Bon Rite of the Deer', involving the slaughter of a deer and thousands of horses, bulls, mdzo, mules, pigs, goats, sheep, dogs and birds (Norbu 1995: 185,186). Supernatural signs were seen at the sacrifice, but the king was disgusted by the carnage. The old Lhasa block print edition of the biography of Ye shes mtsho rgyal also records that four seasonal sacrificial rites were held which involved large numbers of animals (Dung dkar 1991: 3). The most notorious allusion to human sacrifice is found in the T'ang annals where five or six 'common fate' friends of the king were buried with him at his funeral (Haarh: 346).

Even today allegations are made that animals are sacrificed to solemnize oaths and by those who practice sorcery. A historical conflict between the Bon po and Buddhists lies at the heart of these literary accounts of animal sacrifice. The Buddhists are firm in their belief that until the establishment of their religion, the practice of animal sacrifice was widespread. The Bon po contend that their religion was, and still is, a religion of non-violence as propagated by gShen rab mi bo che. To this day, in the Himalayan rimland of Nepal, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh animal sacrifice to yul lha and other non-Buddhist deities is common. In Sikhim, among the Lepchas, animal sacrifice to gNyan chen thang lha probably still continues. In pre-Buddhist times, the shamans of Buryat sacrificed horses, including foals, to mountain spirits at communal festivals and placed the bones of burnt sacrificial animals on stone altars (Tartar: 8-10). Gradually, the lamaist establishment was able to halt animal sacrifice in Buryat and replace it with incense, gtor ma and prayer flag offerings (Tartar: 10). Until recently, the Mongour Mongols sacrificed goats and sheep to mountain spirits (Tartar: 10).

Animal sacrifice among hunters and gatherers was the exception to the rule. This is corroborated by ethnographic studies of cultures which have retained this type of economy. For example, most tribes of North American Indians, the Kalahari bushmen and Australian aborigines did not practice animal sacrifice. In the Mesolithic period, with the domestication of animals and the cultivation of food plants, the situation began to change in countries bordering Tibet. In Neolithic graves in Kashmir, evidence of animal sacrifice has been discovered (Thomas: 110). In Neolithic China, the ritual sacrifice of pigs, dogs, sheep and oxen was carried out (Allen: 103), which attests to changes that had occurred in the relationship between humans and animals in the late Stone Age. Psychological reasons for this change in the human-animal relationship are probably related to 1) a perceived need to recapture the power and magic of the hunting way of life; 2) an attempt to control the vagaries of nature and re-establish the order of the universe; and 3) to harness and direct human aggression in order to establish social cohesiveness. Animal sacrifice in Tibet is not well studied, but if

adjoining countries are any indication, it was introduced in the more sedentary Neolithic farming communities and continued into the Bronze and Iron Ages. This is suggested by a comparative structural analysis of prehistoric cultures.

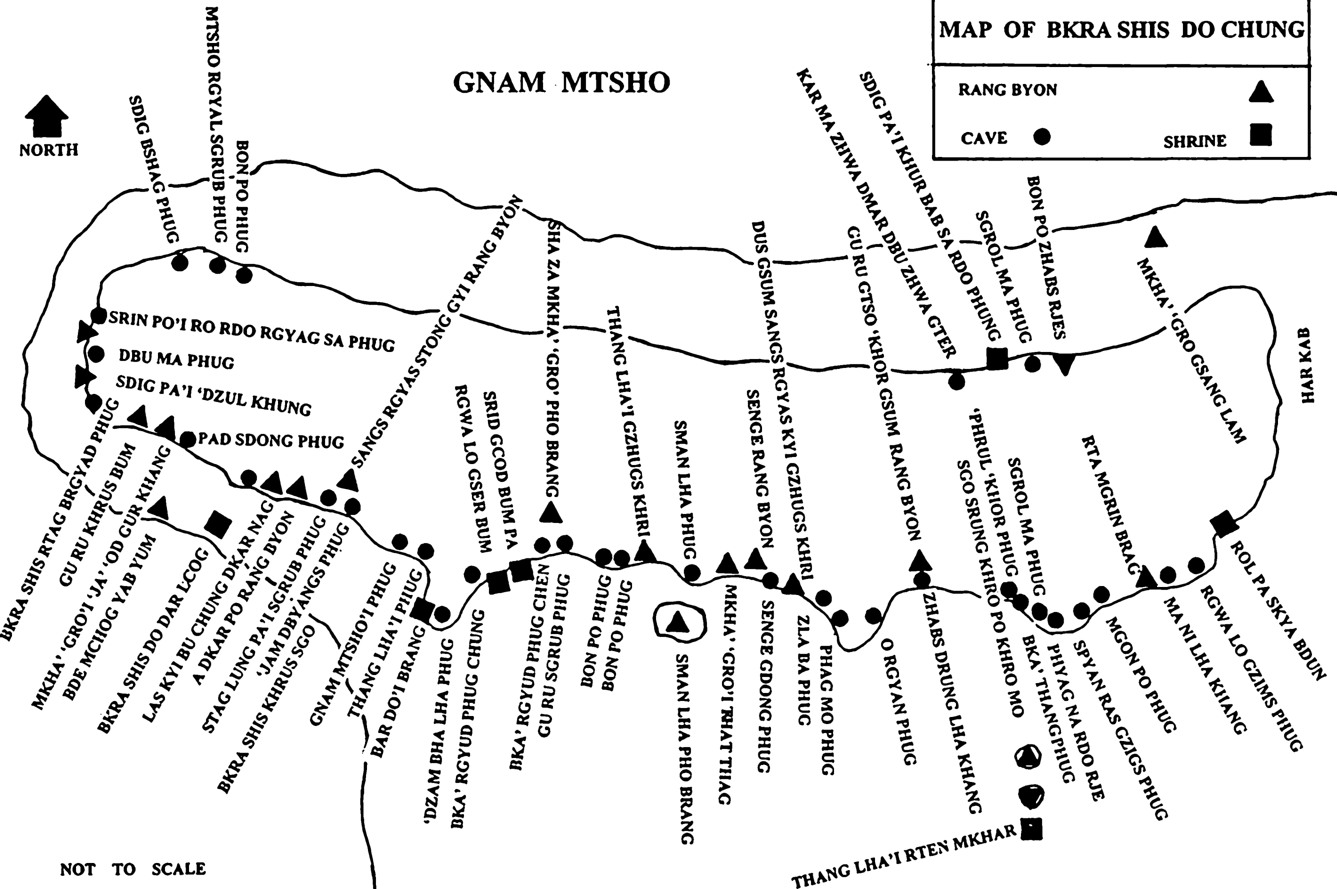
16. As documentation is lacking, a most cautious approach is warranted. This assessment of the lack of evidence for animal sacrifice in the rock art of the Byang thang comes from field surveys conducted by the author and from the book *Art of Tibetan Rock Paintings* which constitutes a preliminary attempt to examine this hypothetical ancient custom.

17. The text features a rounded white gtor ma (gtor ma dkar zlum)(fol. 1r). Empowerment of the gtor ma includes meditation on the deity, visualization of the deity, and becoming the deity (fol. 1v). Furthermore, it includes visualization of the container (the field of offering) and its contents, with their seed syllables bum' 'u and kham. As a result of this empowerment, the ingredients become like an ocean of nectar and the ritual fulfils all wishes and desires.

    After the description and praise of rDo rje kun grags ma (fol. 2r-4v), ritual offerings are made to honor the deity. These include shug pa (juniper wood), stag pa (birch wood), mngar gsum, dkar gsum, phye ma and incense, including mkhan pa, spos dkar, A ka ru, and red and white sandalwood (tsan dan)(fol. 5r). The text tells us that the clouds of smoke from the fragrant and holy incense offerings purify humans and gods. Other offerings include gold, silver, copper, iron, pearls, turquoise, barley, rice, peas, various medicinal substances, an arrow with vulture feathers affixed to it, fine cloth, and a white, yellow, green and red hanging banner ('phran)(fol. 5v). As a ritualist may not have all these precious materials on hand, improvisation and figurative offerings are commonplace.

    The structure of the ritual is as follows: 1) empowerment of the ritual components and ritualist (gsol ba'i dbang); 2) the description and praises of gNam mtsho (bstod pa); 3) bestowal of offerings upon the deity (mchod pa); 4) reminding the deity of her oath; and 5) making a series of requests/demands on the deity (bskul pa). After the initial devotions the officiant has done his part and now, in reciprocity, the goddess must fulfil her part as a protectress. She is enjoined to protect practitioners, the lama (the officiant), the sponsor (of the ritual), repel disease and war, and propagate sTag lung religion throughout the world (fol. 7v). She is, moreover, asked to provide food, good fortune (g.yang), treasures, the fecundity of four-legged creatures (livestock), as well as all other needs (fol. 8r). In conclusion, she is asked to "allow our life and glory to grow like the waxing moon, protect the bKa' brgyud religion and the transmission of the teachings, as well as lead us in the right way through listening (thos), thinking (bsam) and meditation (sgom)."

18. This information on the mTsho rdzes was also provided by bLo bzang bstan 'dzin in personal communication.


MAP OF BKRA SHIS DO CHUNG
RANG BYON
CAVE
SHRINE
GNAM MTSHO
NORTH
NOT TO SCALE
HAR KAB
ROL PA SKYA BDUN
RGWA LO GZIMS PHUG
MA NI LHA KHANG
MGON PO PHUG
SPYAN RAS GZIGS PHUG
PHYAG NA RDO RJE
BKA' THANGPHUG
SGO SRUNG KHRO PO KHRO MO
'PHRUL 'KHOR PHUG
SGROL MA PHUG
RTA MGRIN BRAG
MKHA' 'GRO GSANG LAM
BON PO ZHABS RJES
SGROL MA PHUG
SDIG PA'I KHUR BAB SA RDO PHUNG
KAR MA ZHWA DMAR DBU ZHWA GTER
GU RU GTSO 'KHOR GSUM RANG BYON
THANG LHA'I RTEN MKHAR
ZHABS DRUNG LHA KHANG
O RGYAN PHUG
PHAG MO PHUG
ZLA BA PHUG
DUS GSUM SANGS RGYAS KYI GZHUGS KHRI
SENGE RANG BYON
SENGE GDONG PHUG
MKHA' 'GRO'I THAT THAG
SMAN LHA PHUG
SMAN LHA PHO BRANG
THANG LHA'I GZHUGS KHRI
BON PO PHUG
BON PO PHUG
SHA ZA MKHA' 'GRO' PHO BRANG
GU RU SGRUB PHUG
BKA' RGYUD PHUG CHEN
SRID GCOD BUM PA
RGWA LO GSER BUM
BKA' RGYUD PHUG CHUNG
'DZAM BHA LHA PHUG
BAR DO'I BRANG
THANG LHA'I PHUG
GNAM MTSHO'I PHUG
SANGS RGYAS STONG GYI RANG BYON
BKRA SHIS KHRUS SGO
'JAM DBYANGS PHUG
STAG LUNG PA'I SGRUB PHUG
A DKAR PO RANG BYON
LAS KYI BU CHUNG DKAR NAG
BKRA SHIS DO DAR LCOG
BDE MCHOG YAB YUM
MKHA' 'GRO'I 'JA' 'OD GUR KHANG
GU RU KHRUS BUM
BKRA SHIS RTAG BRGYAD PHUG
PAD SDONG PHUG
SDIG PA'I 'DZUL KHUNG
DBU MA PHUG
SRIN PO'I RO RDO RGYAG SA PHUG
BON PO PHUG
MTSHO RGYAL SGRUB PHUG
SDIG BSHAG PHUG

MAP OF GNAM MTSHO

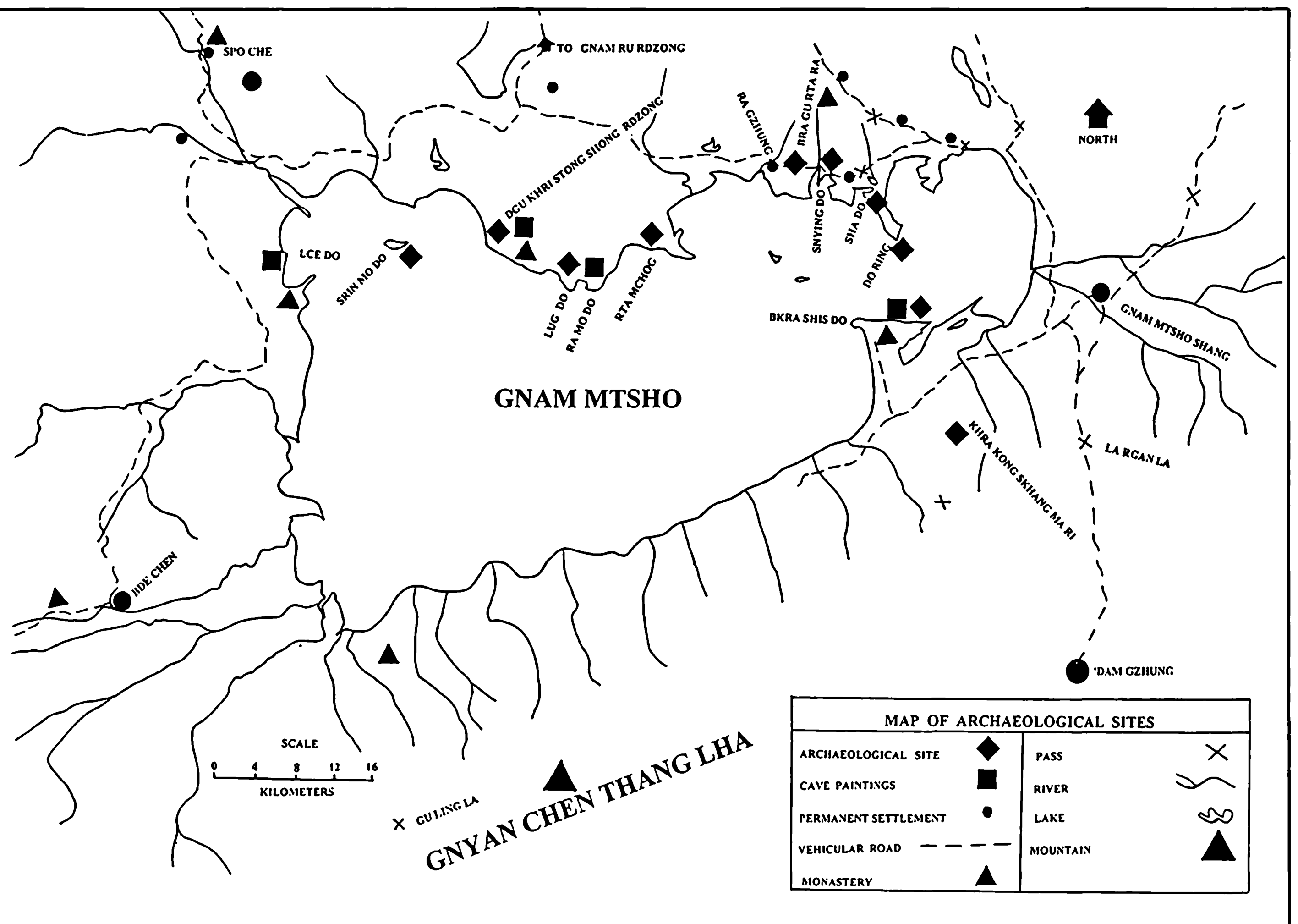
PERMANENT SETTLEMENT	●	MOUNTAIN	▲
TOWNSHIP HEADQUARTERS	⬤	RIVER	~
VEHICULAR ROAD	— —	PASS	✕
MONASTERY	▲	LAKE	○
BATHING PORTAL	◆	PHYSICAL FEATURE	·

SCALE
0 4 8 12
KILOMETERS

NORTH

GNAM MTSHO
GNYAN CHEN THANG LHA

SPO CHE
SPO CHE
GSER MTSHO
RGYA KHANG
MGO SHUG
SCAM THANG
ALA THANG
MGAR CHUNG
BLA LNGA SDINGS DGON PA
DAG KHRA
SBEL NAG
BYAS TSHANG LA
LA SBUG
RDZAB NAG
NYI SHUG
DMAR YAM
CHU BO LA
HAS PO RI GDONG
KHRUS SGO
DO DMAR
DO RING
SHA DO
DO KHRA
SRAG NYAN
SNYING DO
G.YANG DO
GLANG DO
CHIG DO
BU NAG RAB KHA CHU
GSHUNG CHEN
SNGA MON BAR
STONG SHONG PHUG
RIGS GSUM MGON PO
SRIN MO DO
RIGS LNGA DO
THI RANG SMUG PO DO
RMIG KWA DO
BYA DO DGON PA
LUG DO
RA MO DO
KHYI RGAN GAG PA DO
RTA MCHOG NGANG PA DO
DO SKYA DGON PA
RAGS MA DO
KHRUS SGO
'BO CHU
KHRUS SGO
BKRA SHIS DO
BKRA SHIS DO DGON PA
GUNG CHU
NYA CHU BYANG MA
GNAM MTSHO SHANG
NYA CHU LHO MA
LA RGAN LA
NYI RI SO DKAR GDONG
RKYANG RI RDO NAG GDONG
SRIBS RI RNOG NAG GDONG
RDO SBAL RUS SBAL GDONG
DROD BSAG RMA BYA GDONG
DROD LUNG SPANG - RGYAN GDONG
DRED NGAR MO - GDONG
KHRUS SGO
MGAR LHA MO GDONG
KHYUNG NAG GDONG
SPE LUD BLANG MO GDONG
LUG LUNG GUNG MO GDONG
LHA MO MTSHO DAR
RTIS RWA GDONG
GDONG CHEN G.YAG PA GDONG
GDONG CHUNG 'BRI MO GDONG
'BRI LAM SPYANG MO GDONG
GUR CHEN SENGE GDONG
SPANGS SPRA GDONG
GUR CHUNG DGON PA
GU LING LA
'DAM GZHUNG RDZONG
BDE CHEN
NGANG CHU
GRUM THIS DGON PA
DRE CHU


MAP OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE
CAVE PAINTINGS
PERMANENT SETTLEMENT
VEHICULAR ROAD
MONASTERY
PASS
RIVER
LAKE
MOUNTAIN
NORTH
SCALE
0 4 8 12 16
KILOMETERS
GNAM MTSHO
GNYAN CHEN THANG LHA
SPO CHE
TO GNAM RU RDZONG
DGU KHRI STONG SHONG RDZONG
RA GZHUNG
BRA GU RTA RA
SNYING DO
SHA DO
DO RING
BKRA SHIS DO
GNAM MTSHO SHANG
KHRA KONG SKHANG MA RI
LA RGAN LA
'DAM GZHUNG
LCE DO
SHIN MO DO
LUG DO
RA MO DO
RTA MCHOG
HDE CHEN
GU LING LA

CHAPTER FOUR

A Survey of Srin mo do and bKra shis do

Srin mo do

The geomantic heart of gNam mtsho is an island variously called Sri mo do, Srin mo do, Se mo do and Nang do. Srin mo and Sri mo refer to the pre-Buddhist class of deities mentioned in conjunction with the mythology of the Divine Dyad. Se mo is probably a corruption of Srin mo, but if it is a valid spelling it must denote the Zhang zhung language word for 'old woman', an obsolete term. Nang is defined as inside or inner, and refers to the innermost place that the island occupies in the sacred geography of gNam mtsho. Of all the names, Srin mo do is the most common, although its spelling is often corrupted to Sen mo do by the 'brog pa. Sen mo, meaning 'fingernail', is certainly out of context in the case of the island. The variants Se mo do and Sen mo appear to represent the phonetic debasement of Srin mo, as a result of the gradual divergence of Buddhist and pre-Buddhist traditions. However, the Zhang zhung words se mo (old woman) and especially sad mo (lha mo) as representative the original etymology cannot be ruled out.

Nang do is a fairly common name for the island, especially among clerics. Nang do (Inner Island) is appropriately named for several reasons. Of all the holy places (gnas chen) at gNam mtsho, the most protected and inaccessible is Nang do. Like a sanctum sanctorum of a temple, it is the very heart or core of the sacred lake. Historically Nang do was the place that attracted the greatest numbers of saints and meditators, who sought out its pristine, untrammeled qualities. The supreme sanctity of the site is due in equal measure to its inaccessibility, its geomantic power, and the fact that it is the only place, barring the two smaller islands, that is permanently uninhabited by shepherds or their livestock. The inner nature of the island is protected by it only being accessible to pedestrians during the winter months, from about December to April. As would be expected of the most sheltered and defensible site at gNam mtsho, it is brimming with religious tradition.

For the purpose of this study the island will be called Srin mo do, its most popular appellation. Srin mo do is situated in the northwestern portion of gNam mtsho. It is approximately three kilometers long and rises more than 100 meters above the surface of the lake. The island is situated only seven kilometers from the north shore of gNam mtsho. There is no discernible reason why the geographical nucleus of gNam mtsho is called Srin mo do, since whatever traditions were linked to this name have been effaced

by the passage of time. Ma chags (unborn/spontaneously arisen) is sometimes prefixed to the name of the island, indicating its primordial and cosmogonic character. As in other regions of Tibet, srin mo generally have negative connotations for the 'brog pa and are equated with cannibalistic demons. Although, as we have seen, the srin mo was an important component of cosmogonic myths, it is now essentially one and the same as the man-eating Indian rakshasani.

We have already met Srin bdag tsun mo, a cosmogonic goddess, and the srin mo progenitor of the Tibetan race, the primitive lha srin and the srin of the royal foundation myths. In these examples, the srin mo is a divinity and not a frightening demonic figure. Her status was transformed into the inauspicious character of the rakshasani with the advent of Buddhism.[1]

The vestiges of the divine srin mo can be discerned in Tibetan iconography. In the retinue of various Mahakalas, dPal ldan lha mo and lCam sring are both srin mo and srin po, and the mother of lCam sring is a srin mo (Nebesky-Wojokowitz: 31,50,51,61,63,66,89,92). Another tradition concerning the sri, which suggests a broad role for this deity in prehistory, is one which ascribes it to various divisions of time, stages in human life and in essential features of life like water, fire and food (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 302).

The srin seem to have been fundamental to the supernatural world of the aboriginal Tibetans, perhaps the very foundation of that world. By the historical period, however, the srin had been marginalized and demonized by both Buddhists and Bon po. In the Tun-huang manuscripts, the srin are an evil force which must be pressed down (Gyatso: 46). The earlier traditions, now restructured, nevertheless lived on. In both the legendary histories of the *Deb ther dmar po* and the *bShad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*, the srin po are among the non-human rulers before King gNya' khri btsan po (Haarh: 294,295). In the *gZer myig*, three regional srin mo are mentioned: the rKong srin, the Nyang srin and the Dags srin (Haarh: 236). King gNya' khri btsan po was destined to subdue and command inimical and demonic powers ruling the earth or mi yul, with his principal enemies being a Byang srin and a rKong srin, who came disguised as red yaks (Haarh: 215,236,237).[2]

Apparently, in the time of the early Yar lung kings, the srin were not only a chthonic class of beings but also had territorial and political implications. This temporal face of the deity is also reflected in the legend of the srin mo as a benefactor of the catapult and infantry (Gyatso: 35). While it can be postulated that in southern Tibet the srin were a dominant force, the lack of historical records does not allow the same to be unequivocally said for gNam mtsho. It cannot be ruled out that rather than an aboriginal feature of cultural life at gNam mtsho, the mythology of the srin was imported from southern Tibet. The Bon po, however, maintain that srin such as Srin bdag tsun mo are Zhang zhung deities. The paucity of historical materials available does not permit an assessment of the origins of the srin. Therefore, we can only assume that it was common to both Tibet and Zhang zhung and represents an aboriginal pan-Tibetan deity.

Although a myth of the subjugation of the srin mo has not been found for gNam mtsho, the Buddhist subjugation of gNam mtsho phyug mo also depended on wrenching it from its earlier cultural milieu and redefining it.[3] As the island became a magnet for Buddhist meditators, its legendary associations and sacred geography were gradually altered in consonance with the new religious tradition. The human occupation of Srin mo do nonetheless long predates Buddhism. The early occupation of the island is revealed in the remains of one or two rings of stones reportedly found on the island. The original function of these constructions is not known to the 'brog pa although they believe that they belong to a pre-Buddhist culture. We will examine the possible function of similar stone rings found at Lug do in the next chapter. Another ancient structure on Srin mo do was a three-storey stone building connected with the legendary ancestor of the local 'brog pa, Bra gu ngom ngan, which tragically was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. It is likely that Srin mo do was the headquarters or refuge of the pre-Buddhist religious cults or establishments in the region. The location, sanctity and mythology of the island warrant such a view.

According to an informed local sngags pa, there is a circumambulatory trail around Srin mo do which is about the same length as the one found at bKra shis do chung (around five kilometers). Sacred caves located in the escarpment of the island are said to include the following: Karma pa phug, Ras chung pa phug, gLing ras pa padma rdo rje phug, Gwa lo rin po che phug, rGyal ba lo ras pa phug and the kLu khang. During Kishen Singh's exploration of gNam mtsho in 1872, he reported from Do skya dgon pa that a rDo rje phag mo temple existed on the summit of an unnamed island (Kishen Singh: 135), which could only be Srin mo do.

A gnas bshad (guide) for "Ma chags se mo do" is provided in the text, *gNam mtsho gnas chen bshad dad pa'i chu rgyun* published in 1991 (sTag lung rtse sprul: 22,23,24). According to this guide, Srin mo do was blessed by Gu ru rin po che and is a mind emanation of 'Od dpag med. Yogis are supposed to have much success here and the island has seen both Bon po and Buddhist practitioners. Gu ru rin po che purportedly gave initiations here to the lamas Dran pa nam mkha' and Khye'u chung mkha' lding, which consisted of Padma zhi khro, the six root deities of rDo rje sems dpa' and He ru ka dpa'i bo gcig. Gu ru rin po che instructed his disciples to practice at gNam mtsho do, and thus the island and lake have been an important gnas chen for Buddhists since the period of the first diffusion (bstan pa snga dar). Mi la ras pa (1040-1143) is said to have meditated at gNam mtsho and to have achieved much here including the eight attainments (yon tan brgyad) and the ten signs (rtags bcu). Ras chung pa (Ras chung rdo rje grags pa) is supposed to have met Mi la ras pa at Srin mo do and to have requested teachings from him. Mi la ras pa agreed and bestowed teachings and initiations on Ras chung pa. Other great religious personages who graced Srin mo do include Ye shes mtsho rgyal, 'Bri gung pa chen po (1143-1217), gNam mtsho ba chen po (disciple of the second Karma pa), Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, rGwa lo tsa ba rin po che and Nor dpal bzhad pa rdo rje. The lama Karma gling pa is said to have had a black stone with a

white clockwise hand spiral in it which was bestowed on him at the dGa' ba tshal cemetery at Srin mo do (Ka' tog si tu: no. 492).

According to sTag lung rtse sprul's guide, Srin mo do is where Gu ru rin po che subdued kLu bdud rdo rje, who is most probably the Bon deity kLu bdud thang lha. On the east side of the island is the kLu khang phug pa, which consists of two chambers, one large and one small. On the right side of the large chamber is a self-formed image of a crow, where the 11th century saint rGwa lo tsa ba locally called rGwa lo rin po che) invoked mGon po. mGon po vividly appeared to the lama here and, from that time, the cave has been known as mGon po phug. South of this cave is rGwa lo'i gzim phug, where rGwa lo rin po che fashioned a gold vase. There are many rang byung images in this cave and a special platform where mandalas were made. This cave is also the site from which dPal bzhad pa rdo rje's disciple Ras chung pa went to the realm of the dakinis. Near rGwa lo gzim phug is another cave called 'Od gsal phug (Shining Cave), where Gu ru rin po che is said to have meditated. Subsequently, the yogi Ye shes chas 'byung meditated here, generating a brilliant light, which explains how the cave got its name. Inside the cave the fingernails and hair of the great gter ston Chos kyi dbang phyug (Gu ru chos dbang—1212-1273) were enshrined and there is also a small reliquary mchod rten containing relics of the ninth Karma pa dBang phyug rdo rje (1556-1603). In the corner of 'Od gsal phug is a self-formed image of bDe mchog yab yum. Above 'Od gsal phug is a natural stone throne of Gu ru rin po che and nectar which is reputedly a panacea. Some people claim that this nectar is a gift of the klu. West of 'Od gsal phug is rDzong dmar, the cave of Do pa dar she. It has three levels and is said to resemble a handsome elephant. Nearby are black stone stupas, the smallest of which are the size of barley grains and the largest three times this size.[4] In the vicinity, rGwa lo rin po che cut his hair, causing a thicket of shrubs to appear.

The Biographies of the Saints of gNam mtsho

In the hagiographies of various well-known Buddhist masters, mention is often made of gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha in conjunction with pilgrimages and retreats. A common theme through all of these accounts, and one that transcends sect and time, is the loyalty of the Dyad to these saints; gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho act as friends, patrons, disciples and protectors of the Buddhist adepts who visit them.

One of the most famous religious personages to live at gNam mtsho, including Srin mo do, was rGyal ba lo ras pa (Lo ras pa dbang phyug brtson 'grus)(1188-1250), a 'Brug pa bka' brgyud practitioner.[5] rGyal ba lo ras pa was born into a prosperous family; his father was a rNying ma practitioner and his mother a very pious woman. The couple wanted a boy so they went on pilgrimage to Lhasa to pray to Thugs rje chen po. That night the mother-to-be had a dream of a jewelled arrow piercing her head and rays of light covering her surroundings. The birth of rGyal ba lo ras pa was accompanied by many auspicious signs.

After his birth, his family became increasingly prosperous but it was prophesied that there would be no inheritor because rGyal ba lo ras pa would pursue a religious way of life. When he was young, a yogi recognized him as an emanation of a bodhisattva. At the age of 16 he met his guru, Chos rje 'gro ba'i mgon po, was ordained a monk and given the name dBang phyug brston 'grus. He grew in experience and stature; one day when he heard about a place called Se mo do, where three learned practitioners had spent a winter, and which could only be reached by crossing mountains and rivers. He obtained permission from his mother to go to Se mo do in order to pursue his practice. En route he spent two months at a place called Bya lung gi brag. He experienced difficulties here but saw it as an opportunity to further his meditation.

After giving teachings to merchants and fishermen he arrived at gNam mtsho. He discovered that the ice on the lake had recently melted; he didn't know how he would reach Se mo do. He met a group of fishermen and requested them to take him to the island in their boat. They replied that since neither they nor meditators could see the breadth of the vast gNam mtsho, they could not expected to cross it. They went on to explain that, apart from rGwa lo rin po che and 'Ol kha sgams chung, no one had ever stayed on the island alone because of the dangers. The fishermen told the saint that the water of the lake is so salty that even ascetics could not bear to drink it and food was very difficult to procure. rGyal ba lo ras pa remained firm in his desire to visit Se mo do. He gained mental strength from thinking to himself that despite passing through a cyclic existence many times, he had done little to help sentient beings, and that to die in the quest for enlightenment would be of no consequence. He announced to the fishermen that it would be a highly meritorious act to give him passage. One young fisherman, seeing the saint's resolve, volunteered to take him, providing rGyal ba lo ras pa blessed him. Then the elder brother of the fisherman who had volunteered stepped forward and told the saint that he was more experienced for such a journey. At this time an enormous wave came from the lake and forced everyone back from the shore. Instead of becoming dispirited, the saint prayed to his guru and the lake miraculously became calm.

It was a starlit evening when they embarked on the journey to Se mo do. In three corners of the boat leather sacks were placed as ballast. The fisherman sat to one side of the boat, rGyal ba lo ras pa to the other, and a sack of rtsam pa weighing about 30 kilograms was also stored. Before daybreak, they heard many different sounds coming from the lake and observed frogs, snakes and other creatures grabbing hold of the boat. The fisherman became terrified and begged rGyal ba lo ras pa to pray for them. The saint prayed to Kun bzang yab yum and 'O dod ma. His guru appeared in the middle of the lake surrounded by rays of light and holding a golden vessel, and with this vision all specters were dispelled. When the saint asked the fisherman what he saw, he replied, "Only a bright light in the sky in front of the boat." Morning soon arrived and they landed at Se mo do. The fisherman, deeply impressed in the boat by rGyal ba lo ras pa, refused payment for his efforts.

At Se mo do both yogi and fisherman beheld the sun rise and set unobstructed. The water on all sides of the island was the color of lapis lazuli and glistened in the sunshine. On the island was a plain of grass as smooth as the palm of a hand, and in the center of it was a jewel-like outcrop the side of which resembled the wings of a vulture. On the south side was the kLu khang cave which was very clean and attractive. Gu ru rin po che and other great saints had blessed this cave and the acquisition of wisdom was facilitated here. Seeing all these benefits, the saint and fisherman became very pleased and, resolving to stay, divided the bag of rtsam pa into two parts.[6] The power of rGyal ba lo ras pa's meditation increased at Se mo do and he sang religious songs to all of the mi ma yin (elemental spirits), who were greatly attached to him. gNyan chen thang lha and rDo rje kun grags ma, manifesting as a young man and as chief of the lha respectively, came to listen to the lyrical poems he had composed and to receive teachings from him.

In the second year, rGyal ba lo ras pa exhausted his food stocks but persevered with his meditation. He began to have visions of light day and night and, through the harmonizing of wisdom and method, he developed great insight into the nature of phenomena. He never felt any uneasiness or fear at Se mo do. One day his guru appeared before him and announced that he had obtained all the benefits of meditation that he possibly could at Se mo do, and that the time to leave and serve sentient beings had come. In total, he spent two years on the island, gaining many realizations. When the lake was frozen, a group of shepherds came to Se mo do on foot and were surprised to see that the saint was still alive. A group of meditators also came and invited rGyal ba lo ras pa to visit them on the mainland, where he remained for one year. In the following year, he desired to return to Srin mo do but learned that some 'brog pa were staying there and instead went to Zhwa do.[7] At Zhwa do, he met a monk who offered him some old butter, a sack of grain, meat and some other provisions. When the ice broke up, the monk could not leave the island so he became a disciple of rGyal ba lo ras pa. The monk stayed on one side of the island and the saint on the other side. One day rGyal ba lo ras pa had a vision that his mother had passed away. He went into deep meditation and dedicated prayers to his mother. He knew his prayers had been well received because he experienced disks of energy in the soles of his feet.

The next year, when the lake was unfrozen, seven yoginis appeared and predicted that in the next three years his efforts to help sentient beings would be successful. rGyal ba lo ras pa told the yoginis that he had no food. They instructed him to look towards the lake where he saw the dead body of a female yak. He used it is as a source of food until it ran out in the middle of the summer. He then found a human corpse but could not bear to eat it. Overwhelmed, he took his belt and tried to hang himself in a tree, but at this moment his guru appeared and ordered him to desist from committing suicide. To soothe him, his guru sang to rGyal ba lo ras pa about the need to dispel his feelings of guilt. His guru also gave him permission to keep company with other people. That night, the guru consoled rGyal ba lo ras pa by singing to him. In the morning, the two of them went to the edge of the lake and rGyal ba lo ras pa saw a strip of ice no wider than

a bolt of woollen cloth extending from the island to the mainland. The guru ordered him on to the ice and directed him not to look back. As he crossed the narrow strip of ice, rGyal ba lo ras pa observed a red woman with one eye collecting it from behind him. The saint reached the nomadic camp of bTsed pa and met a man who inquired where he had come from. The saint explained that he had just come from Zhwa do. The man did not believe rGyal ba lo ras pa because the lake was unfrozen and accused him of being a liar. That evening, however, a group of shepherds arrived and recounted seeing the extraordinary spectacle of two monks crossing the open water. This story spread throughout the region.

rGyal ba lo ras pa then roamed for one year at mChog dgon, Nya ri khang stong, rMa bya zho dil and other places, surviving on very little food. He was asked to become the lama of a 'brog pa camp but refused. He left the region and visited sTod, only to return again. This time he remained for 13 years near Jo mo gangs dkar, at a lake surrounded by mountains. Again he was plagued by hunger and thought to leave the region, but the goddess Jo mo gangs dkar sha med appeared to him in a dream, and told him that he would not have to worry about food in the future. After this dream he never went hungry again. He met a sponsor who offered to build a temple for him but he declined the offer, preferring to wander around unencumbered. From the gNam mtsho region he went to 'O yug in gTsang and then to various cremation places in gTsang. He was able to overcome all obstacles, his wisdom increased, and he obtained adamantine meditational equipoise, clairvoyance and other miraculous abilities. rGyal ba lo ras pa died in his 63rd year on the 21st day of the Ninth Tibetan month in the morning. His death was accompanied by an earthquake, flowers falling down from the sky, rainbows and a band of red light in the western sky. On the first day of the next month many deities appeared around his body, which was seated in a meditation posture.

In the *Ra lo'i rnam thar kun khyab snyan pa'i rnga sgra* by Ra ye shes senge, the tale is told of the saint Ra lo tsha ba's (b. 1016) encounter with gNyan chen thang lha (Ladrang Kalsang: 94). On his way back from India, the saint passed by gNyan chen thang lha and was invited by the mountain god into his palace. Entering a door in the mountain, he came to a three-storey white crystal palace. He remained there for three days, during which time he gave the mountain deity teachings on 'Jigs byed. In return gNyan chen thang lha offered the saint seven measures of gold, 100 blue water-horses, 1,000 divine 'bri, and 10,000 sheep of the klu. The *Chos rje kar ma pa sku 'phreng rim byon gyi rnam thar mdor bsdus dpag bsam khri shing la* by Karma nes don bstan rgyas records that, whilst on pilgrimage, the 10th Karma pa rGyal mchog chos dbyings rdo rje (1604-1674) was received by gNyan chen thang lha in the guise of a small white boy with a head ornament (zur phud lnga) who offered him a crystal bowl filled with incense (no. 421). According to the Chos rje *Karma pa sku 'phreng rim byon gyi rnam thar mdor bsdus dpag bsam khri shing la*, the second Karma pa (Karma pakshi, 1204-1282), was offered a golden vase by gNam mtsho klu sman and Lha chen thang la circumambulated him during a pilgrimage by the Karma pa (No. 69).

In the *History of the Karma bKa' brgyud pa Sect*, found in the *Collected Works of Si tu pan chen* (1699/1700-1774), the experiences of the fourth Karma pa, Rol pa'i rdo rje (1340-1383), at gNam mtsho are detailed (Vol. 1: nos. 349,350). At Se mo do he had a vision of bDe mchog yab yum and his retinue of dpa' bo (celestial tantric practitioners) and rnal 'byor ma (yoginis). At Zho dom mo cher, the Karma pa apprehended the so so yang dag rig bzhi, the bodhisattva's four perfect understandings of phenomena, and at mTsho mo ru chung he realized stability of body, speech and mind. At Ngang pa stong (Ngang pa do) he had a vision of the Buddha and his entourage, and in the northern regions (byang phyogs gyi rgyud) he unmistakably comprehended Mahayana (Theg pa chen po). The same text records that the seventh Karma pa, Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454-1506) circumambulated gNam mtsho (gNam mtsho'i do bskor) in the Year of the Bird (Vol.1: no. 555).

The *History of the Karma bKa' brgyud pa Sect* also documents the pilgrimages to gNam mtsho of two Zhwa dmar pa lamas. While in his 36th year in the Year of the Monkey, the fifth Zhwa dmar pa dKon mchog yon lag (1525-1583) went on a far-ranging pilgrimage which included bKra shis do (Vol. 2: no. 90). In the Year of the Iron Mouse, the sixth Zhwa dmar pa Gar dbang chos kyi dbang phyug (1584-1630), visited gNam mtsho via bKra shis lhun po, Jo mo gangs dkar and Yangs pa can (Vol. 2: no. 260). There the goddess gNam mtsho offered him the jewels from the top of her head while gNyan chen thang lha made many offerings, and the Zhwa dmar pa administered dge bsnyen vows to the mountain. In the *'Bri gung gling shes rab 'byung gnas chen rnam thar* it records that in 1218 'Bri gung gling pa meditated for one year in a cave at gNam mtsho before proceeding to Ti se (Vitali 1996: 220-221). This saint's pilgrimage to gNam mtsho is also recorded in the *'Bri gung gser phreng*.

In the autobiography of 'Bri gung rig 'dzin chos kyi grags pa (1595-1659?), an account of his experiences at gNam mtsho is given (nos. 105,106,107,108). At the end of it the lama excuses himself for writing briefly and not in detail. He notes that he is very old, his eyes are weak, his hands are unsteady and that he is not capable of strenuous exertion. In any event, he leaves us with a vivid description very much in line with the miraculous experiences of other Buddhist saints. 'Bri gung rig 'dzin chos kyi grags pa's travelling party included the headman (dpon po) of gDong dmar, Karma g.yu rgyal, a grandson of the 'Bri gung pa. The party arrived at gNam mtsho and decamped at gLang dil near the Nya chu (on the east side of gNam mtsho). The Lama and his party went to a high point at the nearby bKra shis do and offered extensive prayers and incense. Flowers rained down from the sky as a result and a rainbow flanked by clouds appeared over an emerald-green colored gNam mtsho. The white hand and forearm print of Gu ru rin po che also appeared on the lake and were seen by all in attendance. The local Hor pa headman, out of gratitude for having witnessed this marvellous event, presented the lama with a white horse.

That night the party stayed at rGwa lo phug (at bKra shis do) where 'Bri gung rig 'dzin chos kyi grags pa had a vision of Gu ru rin po che, who offered him a long life

initiation and prophetic teachings (lung bstan). At the first light of the day gNyan chen thang lha, accompanied by a large retinue, welcomed the lama and prostrated to him. At dawn the lama and his party again went up to the top of bKra shis do where the lama had a vision of the very beautiful and elaborately ornamented goddess, gNam mtsho phyug mo, in the lake. In her left hand the goddess cradled a tray full of jewels and in her right hand she held the reins of a golden fish which was the size of a small hill and was adorned with much finery. Resting on its saddle was a pile of multicolored jewels. The goddess took the reins, which were like a white scarf, and handed them to the lama. Meanwhile the rest of the party, not privy to the vision, saw a black thunderous wave rapidly approaching bKra shis do. They were filled with fear, thinking that it was an aquatic monster, a chu srin. 'Bri gung rig 'dzin chos kyi grags pa then turned towards Se mo do and suddenly realized that in his last life he had meditated there in a cave for the well-being of all sentient beings. Thereafter the party returned to gLang dil and broke camp.

The lama and his party then went to a sacred place called Byang 'bab rom brag where they passed the night. 'Bri gung rig 'dzin chos kyi grags pa slept in a treasure cave while the Hor pa headman slept outside. At first light the deity rTsom chen gang bzang (gSam bstan gangs bzang), dressed in white clothes, appeared to the lama who administered the bsnyen gnas chen yon lag brgyad (eight precepts of an upasaka) vows to the deity. The Hor pa headman and the rest of the party heard loud noises and footsteps coming from the cave that night and asked the lama about them. As it was a secret matter, however, 'Bri gung rig 'dzin chos kyi grags pa only partially revealed their cause.

Perhaps the most important hagiographies relevant to the early history of gNam mtsho concern the sTag lung pa lama Chos sku Sangs rgyas yar byon (1203-1272) and his disciples, Kong po dar shes and 'Bring ston sha'kya, found in the *sTag lung chos 'byung* (pp. 269-302). This history of the great personages of early Tibet and the holiest lamas of the sTag lung sect was written by sTag lung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1574-1621). The first biography presented is that of Sangs rgyar yar byon (pp. 269-289). It was compiled from *rNam thar chen mo ma thang* by Rwa skyes brag pa rin chen rdo rje, and from the *Tshigs bcad ma ya thang gi gser phreng* by rTogs ldan chen po gtsang dar ldom bu ba (pp. 288,289). It details the extraordinary life and experiences of Sangs rgyas yar byon until he reached his final worldly destination, gNam mtsho (pp. 269-286). It then sketches his life at the sacred lake (pp. 286-289).

Sangs rgyas yar byon came to bKra shis do che at gNam mtsho phyug mor from gLing gseb. He practiced in a cave near the junction of the two do (headlands). Through his gtum mo practice he melted all the stones around him and formed a sacred mass. As easily as one ordinarily makes prints in the mud, the great lama made hand and foot prints in stone. From this time until his death many other unimaginable, ineffable and miraculous manifestations of his body, speech and mind appeared. When he was 69 years old, in the Year of the Iron Sheep, on the celebration of bDe bar gshegs pa ldes mchod (perhaps Sa ga zla ba), Sangs rgyas yar byon addressed an assembly and gave

teachings. In the mid-winter of that year, close disciples visited him after eating meat, defiling the saint and causing him to fall ill. During his sickness he saw the pure land paradises and the deities of his practice. For seven consecutive months devotees made special rituals for his protection. During his illness the saint gave extensive instructions, texts and sacred objects to his two nephews with whom he had a close relationship. He also authorized one of his nephews to carry the teachings to Khams.

In his 70th year, on the third day of the Sixth Month of the Water Monkey Year, Sangs rgyas yar byon died after having attained great realizations. After his death the individual who brought the saint his yogurt saw a rainbow emitting from his body, and the disciple Khang ba gzhon nus mgron saw the Yab sras gsum[8] enter into and exit from his room. On the fifth day after Sangs rgyas yar byon's death, his body was exhibited to the public. At that time a man named bSod nams rdo rje saw the god sPyan ras gzigs at the body in a sheath of white light. The saint's chanter heard the saint in the sky instruct him to continue to chant. From the funeral pyre stupas, conch shells, seed syllables and holy statues appeared and, wherever the smoke spread flowers rained down. The ashes of the saint were placed in a receptacle which took on different divine forms depending on who was looking at it.

In Ngag dbang rnam rgyal's work, the biography of 'Bring ston sha' kya rin chen immediately follows that of his teacher Sangs rgyas yar byon (pp. 289-295). 'Bring ston sha'kya rin chen received many teachings from the exalted Sangs rgyas yar byon. Afterwards he went into retreat for six years at sTag lung pa'i rgod tshang. Once the lamas Kong po dar shes, gCung po tshul shes and Mi nyag rgyal shes came to visit Sha' kya rin chen who, through his clairvoyance, saw them coming from a distance while he was meditating in a cavity in the ground. Sha' kya rin chen invited the lamas into his chamber but they were unable to even get their heads inside. The three visiting lamas received teachings from Sha' kya rin chen and then headed for Se mo do. Before leaving Kong pa dar shes vowed to attain spiritual realizations at Se mo do and exhorted Sha' kya rin chen to do the same. At Se mo do, Kong po dar shes had a vision of eight wisdom protector dakinis.

rJe Sa skya pandita and his nephew visited sTag lung dgon pa, bestowed teachings on Sha' kya rin chen and granted him permission to go on pilgrimage to western Tibet. As a gift rJe Sa skya pandita presented him with eight cakes of blessed jaggery. Sha' kya rin chen visited Gangs rin po che and mTsho ma pham among other places. After the pilgrimage Sha' kya rin chen went to Bar le brag dmar at gNyan chen thang lha (between sNying drung and 'Dam gzhung) to visit his brother Tshul shes who had built a monastery there. Tshul shes invited him to stay with him and teach. Sha' kya, seated on a throne, was teaching at a place called Sang de brag chos, when a horseman in the costume of Mi nyag suddenly appeared, and requested him to remain and offered to support him. The horseman then quickly disappeared. This spectacle was a sign that gNyan chen thang lha was an ally of Sha' kya rin chen's.

Sha' kya rin chen then went to sTag lung dgon pa and made offerings, and he received

teachings from the head lama there, who advised to Sha' kya rin chen to go to gNyan chen thang lha for religious practice. Following the head lama's advice, he returned to Bar le brag dmar to practice. He emulated the head lama's life and collected many disciples around him. Together they practiced Phyag rgya chen po (Mahamudra) and the Six Yogas of Na' ro pa. Sha' kya rin chen gradually gathered 500 disciples. A Hor army[9] encamped at sNying drung (not more than 15 kilometers away) attempted to destroy the monastery. Sha' kya rin chen appealed to his protectors as black clouds formed and blood-colored hailstones and other objects fell. repelling the Hor army.

Sha' kya rin chen then returned to the sTag lung dgon pa and carried out a destructive tantric ritual against the tshal pa/mtshal pa which killed many.[10] Ma sangs dwa'u ngo ngan (the leader of the tshal pa),[11] who was dying as a result of the tantric ritual, travelled to sTag lung dgon pa and implored the head lama of the monastery to protect him. The head lama told Ma sangs dwa'u ngo ngan that, in a past life in India, he had a priest named dGe slong dharma gu na who had been reborn as Sha' kya rin chen. The head lama then instructed Ma sangs dwa'u ngo ngan to go and visit Sha' kya rin chen. Sha' kya rin chen knew through his clairvoyant powers that he would be coming and sent an attendant named 'Brong chung rab to meet him. When the Ma sangs arrived before Sha' kya rin chen, he placed his head in the lama's lap and asked for his protection. Sha' kya rin chen performed a ritual to purify Ma sangs dwa'u ngo ngan's defilements and prophesied that he would be reborn in the west as the son of a tantric practitioner and would attain spiritual realizations. Ma sangs dwa'u ngo ngan then died.

The Mi nyag tribe became Sha' kya rin chen's sponsor and his wealth grew immensely. The goddess dPal ldan lha mo came to the lama's assistance whenever he needed her. Upon the death of Sangs rgyas yar byon, Sha' kya rin chen made offerings for him at sTag lung dgon pa and built a reliquary mchod rten which was extant at the time this account was written, circa 1600. gNyan chen thang lha offered five superior gifts to Sha' kya rin chen (dngos grub kyi rdzas lnga) including a crystal of bright light, a flute made of a special kind of bamboo called sbad dkar, a jewel with three eyes, and a flint (me lcags), which were still in existence when this account was written. Sha' kya rin chen had healing powers and, when he taught, the mi ma yin (spirits) would come to listen. At the temple of Bar le steng khang he built a statue of Sakyamuni Buddha surounded by the buddhas of the ten directions. Sha' kya rin chen made great offerings to two monasteries in dBus and Khams, and every month he made a commemorative offering for Sangs rgyas yar byon. Sha' kya rin chen died at the age of 88 in the Year of the Rat in the Seventh Month on the third day (1312 or 1324). When his body was cremated the smoke was infused with rainbows and it rained flowers. There were also other miraculous signs.

Another disciple of Sangs rgyas yar byon's was Kong po dar shes, whose biography follows 'Bring ston sha' kya rin chen's (pp. 295-302). Initially we are informed that he was ordained by 'Ong 'jur mkhan chen rna ra ba, conferred with the name Dar ma shes rab, obtained teachings from various people, and that he came to sTag lung (pp. 295-

298). The biographical account then moves to gNam mtsho (pp. 298-302).

One day Kong po dar shes told his lama that he wanted to go to gNam mtsho. The first evening he arrived there a beautiful woman appeared in his dreams and told him to remain at this do (bKra shis do?) and that she would provide for his needs. This beautiful lady was the mTsho sman. gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho phyug did indeed offer him their hospitality. At 'Brong ke rdza lung, robbers came and took all his possessions. He then went to Do khra to practice tantric sadhanas, and was able to destroy his enemies through his practice. He stayed at Do khra for 10 years and achieved concrete results. On one occasion Kong po dar shes made a painting on cloth of a gtsug gtor. That evening he dreamt of a woman with unequal-sized eyes, who showed him how to sketch. The next day Kong po dar shes made a drawing superior in quality to that of a professional painter with whom he was acquainted.

When Sangs rgyas yar byon passed away, Kong po dar shes constructed a stupa in his memory which was still visible when this account was written. A person named Ba ri zing khyung became one of his sponsors and relieved him of financial burdens. Kong po dar shes went to Se mo do where he stayed for four years. As a result of his practice water miraculously appeared at Se mo do. One day he touched a rock and called on his lady sponsor, gNam mtsho phyug mo, for alms. The next morning the bodies of a baby yak and a female yak came floating towards him. He understood this as a gift from the gzhi bdag. Kong po dar shes also practiced at Bya dur (Bya do), where again water miraculously appeared. From his throat a treasury of Vajra songs was opened, signifying wisdom realization. The two sponsors sBal pa and Bal mur offered him a place for a retreat or monastery at Kong (on the southeast side of gNam mtsho).

Kong po dar shes gathered 30 monks and set up temporary quarters, which served as his monastery, at a place of jewels and protectors called the four jug yags gods. He predicted that in the following year the temporary quarters would be transformed into a temple with a glittering golden roof. He also predicted that at dBu ri'i gdong (on the south side of gNam mtsho) there would be a sgrub khang (place for meditation) with many prayer flags. One day a person named A tsa ra pakshi asked Kong po dar shes for a man to make kitchen fires and a man to work as a kitchen attendant, but added that one to make fires would suffice. Instead of men Kong po dar shes sent three monkeys, one to make fires, one to carry water, and one to work as a miller. A tsa ra pakshi was sorely insulted by this gesture of contempt and sent a messenger with a veiled threat to Kong po dar shes that 80 mounted men would be dispatched. The messenger returned to A tsa ra pakshi and informed him that Kong po dar shes was planning on building a monastery.

At Kong po dar she's camp everyone was confused about what action to take. The lama consoled his followers by exclaiming that he had received the complete teachings of Sangs rgyas yar byon, which are like a full vessel. He also announced his intention to build a monastery at Kong chu mig dmar, the residence of evil lha 'dre. A decision was also made on his part not to appease A tsa ra pakshi. He told his followers that he was

among the 1,800 manifestations of Gu ru rin po che. The lama received a prophecy from the deity mGon po nag po and a report from the lama Do pa dar shes. Kong po dar shes then wrote a letter to A tsa ra pakshi which informed him that he had taken three years to foment the current situation but that he would resolve it in three days. The letter was sealed with red earth. Kong po dar shes observed that if A tsa ra pakshi was the Du dpen sha appointed by men, he was the Du dpen sha appointed by the lha and 'dre. The lama also stated: "We will see who has the better army." That night, from the summit of a place called Kong lha g.yang dkar, a bright light appeared. This engendered such fear in the troops of A tsa ra pakshi that they were rendered totally incapable of attack.

Kong po dar shes then encountered the Bon po and went to see their leader, Seng ge dpal. The lama and the Bon po held a heated debate but, due to his corruption, Seng ge dpal favored the Bon po. After this encounter Kong po dar shes prepared spells ('ud nag po) of destructive magic and released them. Wherever they were directed the Bon po were afflicted with dmar nad and died.[12] Duly terrified Seng ge dpal became a fair arbiter in the debates between Kong po dar shes and the Bon po. One night a disciple of the lama had a dream in which he saw a lone wolf emerge from the plain of Kong after being chased by seven dogs of the bla brang (the residence of the lama). Another disciple espied Kong po dar shes through a window nakedly brandishing a gtor ma and saying: "I shall release the protectors and we will see who wins the disputation." At that very moment the chief of the Bon po died. Later Kong po dar shes exclaimed that practicing sorcery against him was as futile as practicing sorcery against the sky. The lama went on to say that in his practice he was as immovable as a mountain and that Bon po black magic (Bon po'i mthu) was completely ineffectual. He added that they were like a man who had depleted his stock of merit (bsod nams) and at that he conquered the Bon po.

One time Kong po dar shes deputed a messenger to sTag lung dgon pa to make an offering. En route the man's horses were stolen by a Chinese royal emissary (rGya'i gser yig pa). In retaliation, the lama made a gtor ma and sent the god Thang 'bring ngur pa, along with other tantric protectors (Ban dmag, literally Buddhist army) to pursue the Chinese. When the lama clapped his hands, Thang 'bring ngur pa released a barrage of hailstones and a whirling rainbow. The Chinese emissary, awed by the lama's magic, wanted to take him to meet their leader. Kong po dar shes announced to the Chinese that he should be made the royal priest (ti shri' chen po). He noted his control of the Beng kyi bdun (seven aspects of mGon po beng?) which he could send in the middle of the night to the bottom of the ocean and that his lha 'dre could protect the Chinese royal community (rgyal po'i chol kha). The lama added that he did not need an escort to meet the Chinese leader, and he asked the Chinese emissary to return on his own, but the emissary then died.

Kong po dar shes, who had yellowish black hair, was considered to be an emanation of Phyag rdor (rDo rje legs pa). When rain was needed he merely slept near a spring and the klu released rain. Near Rag dung there was a demon called bDud g.yag kham pa which the lama had bound to an oath (dam la btags) and had appointed custodian of

his religious property (dkor bdag). Kong po dar shes lived until his 83rd year in the service of religion and sentient beings. He died in the First Month of the Iron Dog Year (1310). Many sacred objects manifested from his funeral pyre.

Sangs rgyas yar byon, like his contemporary rGyal ba lo ras pa, appears from his biography to have been an ascetic who lived quietly. If we are to read between the lines, such masters avoided sectarian politics and were largely undisturbed. On the other hand, 'Bring ston sha' kya rin chen and Kong po dar shes amassed considerable numbers of men and were embroiled in significant conflicts that resulted in the loss of human life. The battles and temporal struggles of the latter 13th century in which these two lamas took part are steeped in the language of piety obscuring the actual prevailing sociopolitical conditions. Part of their legitimacy as rightful religious heirs to the Dyad is clearly their friendship with the mountain and lake deities. Accounts of this friendship serve to usurp the Dyad from the framework of the non-sTag lung religious traditions. We must keep in mind that these purported historical events were recorded by the victor and are not without bias.

While 'Bring ston sha' kya rin chen frequented the outer side of gNyan chen thang lha, Kong po dar shes was attracted to the inner side of gNam mtsho. Kong po dar shes, like his ally Sha' kya rin chen, had bloody encounters with non-sTag lung pa. The story begins with a conflict with what might be a local tribe of Hor pa led by someone called A tsa ra pakshi. The name of the leader at least in part is derived from Sanskrit; A tsa ra is the Tibetan transliteration of acharya, a revered teacher or scholar, as well as an academic title. Whether this figure represented a Buddhist or non-Buddhist rival (Bon po sometimes have Sanskritic names) cannot be determined from the material available. As with the Hor pa of Sha' kya rin chen, A tsa ra pakshi and his followers are not destroyed but simply awe-stricken by the magic power of Kong po dar shes. The Bon po, however, were killed en masse and their leader, despite showing at least some willingness to co-operate, was killed by Kong po dar shes's magic. The disciple's dream featuring the lone wolf being chased by the seven dogs of the monastery clearly presages the elimination of Bon po power in the region.[13] Whether the Tshal pa of Sha'kya rin chen are related to the Bon po of Kong po dar shes remains unknown.

In addition to the groups discussed above, the biography of Sha' kya rin chen relates that gNyan chen thang lha appeared to the lama in the guise of a Mi nyag pa and that the Mi nyag were his sponsors. The Mi nyag referred to here must be a tribe which migrated from their original homeland in eastern Tibet some centuries earlier. For the mountain god to take on the appearance of the Mi nyag they must have had a long-standing association. Clearly the Mi nyag were allies of the sTag lung pa. Finally, the Chinese enter the scene. In conjunction with them Kong po dar shes speaks of his lha 'dre which will protect the royal community from provocations (rGyal po'i chol kha gang gag pa zhig nga'i lha 'dres bsrung ba yin). This provides an excellent example of a Buddhist incorporating the aboriginal pantheon into his magical practice. Another example of this willingness to embrace the indigenous deities is when Kong po dar shes

exclaims that if A tsa ra pakshi is the Du dpen sha (a Mongol military ranking) appointed by men, he is the Du dpen sha appointed by the lha and 'dre (Go mis bskos pa'i du dpen sha yin na. Nga lha 'dres bskos pa'i du dpen sha yin).[14] Evidentally, not all the lha and 'dre were as malicious (lha 'dre gdug pa can yod) as the ones that dwelt at Kong chu mig dmar.

According to the local sngags pa familiar with the *sTag lung chos 'byung*, Kong chu mig dmar and Kong lha g.yang dkar are situated below the Kong lha, which traverses the gNyan chen thang lha range in the vicinity of bKra shis do. Lastly, it is worth reflecting on the names of several of the characters in the biographical accounts. The sponsors sBal pa, Bal mur and Ba ri zing khyung and the attendant 'Brong chung rab all have names with roots in the pre-Buddhist period. Names such as these have long fallen out of favor in Tibet.

bKra shis do Overview

The largest of the Nyin la do chen bcu brgyad and the only one situated on the south side of gNam mtsho is bKra shis do. bKra shis do, a wedge-shaped peninsula, is much longer on its west than east side because of the contour of the lake. The widest part of the peninsula is its northern side, the end projecting furthest into gNam mtsho. The northern head of the peninsula is about nine kilometers long from east to west. Running along this length is a rocky range with escarpments skirting its base. This range is approximately 150-200 meters in height. This craggy finale to the peninsula is divided into a western and eastern section called bKra shis do chung and bKra shis do chen respectively. The two halves are separated by a plain about 250 meters long, which is marked by a mchod rten and other religious monuments.

To the north of the bKra shis do, the headlands and hills of the northeastern half of the lake are visible across the expanse of the lake. On the east side of the peninsula, a narrow inlet, the womb of rDo rje phag mo, separates it from the remaining portion of the southern shoreline. East is also the direction of the link road connecting bKra shis do with La rgan la and 'Dam gzhung and, via a bifurcation in the road to gNam mtsho chu, the largest administrative center and settlement in the gNam mtsho basin. Owing to the existence of the road, bKra shis do is the most accessible sacred site at gNam mtsho. To the west of bKra shis do the lake and the gNyan chen thang lha range recede into the horizon.

The sparkling red and white limestone escarpments at bKra shis do have over 50 caves steeped in the history and mythology of the region. The art on the walls of some of these caves constitutes one of Tibet's most extraordinary pictorial records of the past. This chain of natural caves, in many shapes and sizes, has attracted people for millennia. The caves provide shelter from the elements and have been an object of devotion for both the indigenous and modern religions of Tibet. In a land of interminable plains and of extreme cold, caves assume special importance from the perspective of survival. The

survival value of the caves merged with the spirituality of the 'brog pa to create a resource with both sacred and mundane dimensions.

The diverse historical strains of 'brog pa culture and the visions of individuals have combined to produce a marvellous and transcendent vision of bKra shis do which is both dynamic and enduring. The sacred geography of bKra shis do incorporates personal interpretation and innovation. This kind of flexibility, inherent in sacred geographical notions at the folk level, permitted the religious and mythological scope of bKra shis do to be amended and revised in conformance with the exigencies of the 'brog pa way of life.

bKra shis do revolves around its natural resources. The headland supports stands of scrub juniper (spa ma) and deciduous scrub, both highly valuable resources in the Byang thang where woody plants of any kind are scarce. Moreover, bKra shis do is near La rgan do, one of the richest summer pastures at gNam mtsho, which is used by 'brog pa whose permanent home bases (gzhi ma) are both in the gNam mtsho basin and in the 'Dam gzhung valley. bKra shis do, therefore, is a natural meeting ground for diverse camps of 'brog pa.

bKra shis do, via the La rgan la or one of the parallel passes, is one of the most accessible places on the Byang thang for travellers coming from southern Tibet. This is because the 5,270 meter La rgan la is among the easiest passes of the gNyan chen thang lha range and gives access to the 'Dam gzhung valley, a natural conduit between southern and northern Tibet. This relative accessibility has made bKra shis do an attractive destination on the Byang thang. Furthermore, bKra shis do has strategic value as a staging area between the northern plains of Tibet and the lower valleys of the south. Its caves allow it potentially to accommodate a relatively large population, such as an army. The strategic value of bKra shis do must have been greatly heightened when the gNyan chen thang la range divided the Zhang zhung and sPu rgyal kingdoms, and may have constituted an important frontier outpost. The strategic, geographical and economic importance of bKra shis do formed the basis for the spectacular cultural flowering that took place here.

The diverse rock paintings found in over one dozen caves of bKra shis do were created over a period of many centuries. Rock paintings are often thought by the 'brog pa to have been self-manifested or to have been the work of divine beings such as dakinis. It is for this reason that they are regarded as holy and are worshipped as an integral part of the bKra shis do gnas chen. One unwelcome outcome of this veneration of the rock paintings, however, is the custom of dabbing butter on them as an offering, which can dissolve the pigments and cause irreparable damage. The 'brog pa also tend to have a historic appreciation of the paintings and to see them as part of their cultural heritage and a vital link with the past. Buddhist and assimilated Bon motifs are easily recognizable by the 'brog pa. However, more ancient compositions generally fall outside the ambit of contemporary knowledge.[15]

The bKra shis do ranges contain scores of rang byung (self-formed) images of deities,

and the hand prints (phyag rjes) and footprints (zhabs rjes) of deities and religious personalities magically imprinted into the rocks. This phenomenon is encountered throughout Tibet at monasteries (dgon pa), hermitages (ri khrod) and pilgrimage centers (gnas chen). The exact number of rang byung objects at bKra shis do is incalculable, as new ones spontaneously appear and old ones disappear or are forgotten. What constitutes a rang byung image in large measure has to do with the propensity and perception of the pilgrim. This is especially true of the more obscure images. Some, however, like the hand print of the third Karma pa, are major and highly renowned landmarks on the skor lam (circumambulatory trail). As with the self-formed goddess gNam mtsho phyug mo, these images are believed to have miraculously manifested of their own accord, or by the conscious action of a deity or saint. They are thought to be manifestations of the body (sku) of the personalities they represent. The closest analogy to the rang byung images are statues and thang ka which are other types of supports for deities (lha rten). The clarity of the images ranges from adroitly realistic to highly ambiguous. Some can only be seen when light conditions permit and others require a strong measure of imagination.

The sites of bKra shis do were an important cultural resource in the prehistoric period. The headland saw various magico-religious activities and other types of ritual and non-ritual behaviors conducted during the A pa hor inhabitation of the region; the caves must have fulfilled many functions—as temples, as domiciles, even as burial chambers. Cave paintings provide us with some insight into the cultural patterns associated with them, but many questions remain.

When Buddhism finally dislodged Bon, bKra shis do became one of the holiest and most important places at gNam mtsho for the new religion. The ancient sacred sites of the headland were molded to fit the prevailing cultural realities and demands of Buddhism. As a result, a new sacred geography came into being, reflecting these cultural changes. New myths, legends and toponyms replaced the earlier ones, transforming bKra shis do into a Buddhist stronghold. The caves became the homes of Buddhist practitioners and, eventually, a Buddhist monastery was established. Any pre-Buddhist architecture on the headland was either razed or left to disintegrate. These ancient man-made monuments now elude a visual survey of the gnas chen, reminding us how complete was the transition to Buddhism.[16]

Bkra shis do chung

Due to the terrain, the road on the peninsula of bKra shis do is forced into the plain between the two ranges of the headland, and this is where the circuits (skor lam) around the ranges begin.[17] Our description of the bKra shis do chung skor lam begins from this plain and proceeds in the clockwise direction of travel taken by Buddhists. If one was going in the customary counter-clockwise direction of the Bon po, the order of sacred sites is of course reversed. The bulk of the 2,800 deities traditionally thought to live at

bKra shis do are found at bKra shis do chung, as are the majority of rang byung images and sacred caves. The circuit around this range is approximately five kilometers long, about half the length of the bKra shis do chen circuit, which explains why it is called Little Good Luck Headland.

In a clockwise direction, the most popular kind of skor ba made at bKra shis do, the first sacred site encountered is a btsan khang. This btsan khang consists of two red-tinted boulders lying on top of one another at the base of the escarpment. Prayer flags are strung between it and the cliff and a small bsang khang (incense oven) made of stone and white earth stands next to it. The btsan khang, a shrine to the btsan, is dedicated to the Rol pa skya bdun, the protectors of bKra shis do. The Rol pa skya bdun are a group of seven btsan mounted on horses, popular with both Bon po and Buddhists. Their shrine is strategically placed at the beginning of the skor lam to guard its sacred treasures. An analogy is found in chapels of the monasteries in which wrathful protectors flank the entrance ways.

A little beyond this protective shrine is a large cave with a well-built facade called rGwa lo'i gzims phug (rGwa lo rin po che's sleeping cave) or rGwa lo sgrub khang (rGwa lo rin po che's house of meditation), which conveys that it was used for both the spiritual and mundane needs of the saint.[18] This cave complex consists of a shrine room about seven meters long and one or two smaller storage caves. There is also a kitchen cave used in the pre-Communist period by practitioners when bKra shis do was a more developed religious center. rGwa lo sgrub phug is currently used by local meditators and sngags pa for shelter and religious practice, just as it has been for many centuries. This continuity of tradition, however, was broken during the Cultural Revolution, as at virtually every other sacred site at gNam mtsho. Precious artifacts and relics assiduously preserved for centuries at rGwal lo sgrub phug were largely destroyed at this time. Attempts have been made to restore the cave, but the losses suffered were irrevocable.

Until the Cultural Revolution, there was a phyag rjes (hand print) of rGwa lo rin po che magically imprinted in the roof of the cave, which can be no longer discerned. There was at one time an imprint of the top of the head of the saint (ka' pa li'i rjes), but this seems to have disappeared. However, a Tibetan letter 'A', said to have been inscribed in the rock by the saint, is still visible. A tooth of rGwa lo rin po che desecrated during the Cultural Revolution was recovered and re-enshrined. The large statue of Mi la ras pa that used to grace the cave was irretrievably lost in the same period. Fortunately, a dark-colored stone with a footprint (zhabs rjes) of rGwa lo rin po che survived, as did a sacred light-colored stone with an orifice in it, called Thang la'i rgya rdo (the Measuring Stone of Thang lha). Above the rGwa lo sgrub phug is a self-formed image of mGon po with the face of a crow (sTag lung rtse sprul: 17).

A few meters to the west of the rGwa lo sgrub phug is a smaller cave called the Ma ni lha khang, and beside it is a self-formed image of rTa mgrin in the escarpment. The next cave in the vicinity is mGon po phug. It is supposed to have a self-manifested image of mGon po ber nag inside it (sTag lung rtse sprul: 17). Continuing west in close

succession is the sPyan ras gzhigs phug and the Phyag na rdo rje phug, followed by a white rang byung likeness of 'Jam dpal dbyangs gar gzigs (Manjushri Beheld Everywhere). Opposite this naturally occurring image on the bench overlooking the lake are two distinctive stone columns, which represent a shrine to sGo srung khro po khro mo, another set of protectors of the bKra shis do gnas chen. sGo srung khro po khro mo is a group of three male and three female wrathful deities who originally belonged to Bon.

At the base of the sGo srung khro po khro mo columns is the Thang lha'i rten mkhar, a shrine built for gNyan chen thang lha, the yul lha. This consists of a recently rebuilt stone shed festooned in prayer flags where bsangs offerings are made to the mountain god. The sanctum inside (nang rten) is yet to accumulate many sacred articles, reflecting its age. Interestingly, rten mkhar called obo which are dedicated to mountain deities are also found in Mongolia and south Siberia (Tartar: 8), and in the Himalayan rimland. Past the 'Jam dpal dbyangs image is the sGrol ma phug. In it are self manifested White and Blue Taras (sTag lung rtse sprul: 17). The next cave is bKa' thang phug. The *Padma bKa' thang* gter ma was found hidden inside this cave (sTag lung rtse sprul: 18). In the pre-Communist period, structures were built around it to house religious practitioners. It is followed by the 'Phrul 'khor phug (Circle of Miracles Cave), a retreat house.

Now comes the most famous cave at bKra shis do, known as Zhabs drung lha khang. This is the site of the dgon pa at bKra shis do, one of four at gNam mtsho which popular tradition says Gu ru rin po che predicted would eventually be founded on the lake. The cave forms the nucleus of the rebuilt monastery. It is comprised of several anterooms for storage and the accommodation of practitioners. The cave enshrines the main chapel which is approximately the same size as the one that existed before the Cultural Revolution. The main image in the lha khang is a figure of Gu ru rin po che. At one time, a very special image of the body, speech and mind of Gu ru rin po che was installed here (sTag lung rtse sprul: 18). New furniture, including the very modest thrones of the two religious personalities most closely associated with the dgon pa, was installed in 1995. These are rDzogs chen rin po che, sPrul sku mDo sngag 'phrin las 'od zer, aged 12, who resides in Nag chu, and Ngag dbang thub bstan, aged 40, who resides in 'Dam gzhung. Earlier this century, their predecessors lived in bKra shis do in the summer and in La lnga sdings dgon pa in the winter. La lnga sdings dgon pa was located in a more sheltered and less windblown place than bKra shis do and near one of the largest concentrations of 'brog pa gzhi ma at gNam mtsho. In the late 19th century, Kishen Singh reported that 35 monks lived at bKra shis do (Kishen Singh: 136). Today a handful of mostly lay practitioners permanently reside at bKra shis do. Three pinnacles which surmount the escarpment above Zhabs drung lha khang are supposed to be rang byung images of Gu ru rin po che and his two main consorts, Ye shes mtsho rgyal and Mandavara.

Within sight of the Zhabs drung phug is O rgyan phug, a cave a just over a meter tall and about six meters long. In the roof of it is a small hollow containing a natural

stone bar where, according to legend, Gu ru rin po che hung his drum (rnga), the sound of which reverberated throughout bKra shis do. To the consternation of the native people, this sacred cave has been turned into a refuse dump and latrine by the burgeoning tourist industry. In the vicinity of this cave is a very smooth rock face called Thang sku brag and a self-manifested image of rNam par snang mdzad (Vairocana)(sTag lung rtse sprul: 18).

Continuing along the skor lam one comes to Phag mo phug and then Zla ba phug. Above Zla ba phug, there is said to be a self-formed image of the throne where the Buddhas of the Three Ages sit (Dus gsum sangs rgyas gyi bzhugs khri). Zla ba phug and Phag mo phug are variously called sGo ma phug and sTag tshang phug (sTag lung rtse sprul: 18). After these caves, one arrives at Senge gdong phug (Lion-Faced Dakini Cave), which has a self-formed image of the Lion-Faced Dakini in the escarpment above it. The next holy site is a fissure in the escarpment which is used as a repository for tsha tsha,[19] and then a vertical white band of rock in the escarpment that some 'brog pa call mKha' 'gro'i thar thag (the Liberation Rope of the Dakinis). At the base of this formation is a tiny hole in the rock, where pilgrims are said to be able to hear the voice of gNam mtsho phyug mo.

Further along, between the escarpment and the lake shore, is a mass of rock roughly 20 meters tall called sMan lha'i pho brang (the Palace of the Medicine Buddhas). With some imagination, pilgrims visualize a divine palace where the eight buddhas of healing reside. At the base of this magical palace among the reddish ma ni stones is a small white oval depression that some say was made by the staff of rGa lo rin po che. In the escarpment opposite this prominent land mark is sMan lha'i phug. This cave complex consists of three small caves. The cave on the west is shallow and its roof is covered in brag zhun (melted stone), a mineral exudate with medicinal properties. Adhering to it are pieces of yarn and tufts of wool left by pilgrims as offerings to the Medicine Buddhas. The central cave is rectangular in shape; dabs of butter stick to its ceiling as offerings. The eastern cave is very shallow and without modification. Somewhere in this general vicinity is the phyag rjes of the lama 'Ba' rong dar ma dbang phyug (1127-1199)(sTag lung rtse sprul: 18).

Adjacent to the sMan lha'i phug is Thang lha'i bzhugs khri, a place where the god gNyan chen thang lha purportedly manifests. The next sacred site on the bKra shis do chung skor lam is O rgyan pad zhwa (Lotus Hat of Gu ru rin po che), a three-meter-tall boulder which is flat on one side, and which used to be accompanied by a shrine. Continuing on, one arrives at two small caves, in which some Buddhists say the Bon magician Na ro bon chung stayed.[20] One of these caves contains tsha tsha and the other a beautifully built reliquary mchod rten constructed in 1994-1995. This one-meter-tall mchod rten was built by a bKa' brgyud sprul sku and contains relics of Dil mgo mkhyen brtse'i rin po che.

In the same section of the escarpment as the two preceding caves is the Gu ru rin po che sgrub phug. This cave is suspended in the escarpment and is about eight meters

long and four meters wide, but only a little more than one meter tall. In the front of the cave is seeping water, the sgrub chu of Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and in the rear of the cave is the sgrub chu of Gu ru rin po che. Also in this cave is a soft red stone which is considered to be the remains of tshogs offerings made by Gu ru rin po che. Both the water and friable red stone are eagerly gathered by pilgrims as byin brlabs. Some say a rang byung image in the cave represents Gu ru rin po che's kha tam ga (tantric staff). Gu ru rin po che sgrub phug used to contain a golden vase made by rGwa lo rin po che (sTag lung rtse sprul: 18). Outside this cave is a small hole in the rock face where legend has it Gu ru rin po che imprisoned and then incinerated a human-eating brag srin mo. The remains of the rock ogress are said to have remained in the hole until the Cultural Revolution.

Within sight of the Gu ru rin po che sgrub khang is a small earth-colored mchod rten called rGwa lo gser bum. This was not completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and some of its consecrated contents remain intact. This stupa commemorates rGwa lo rin po che's presence at gNam mtsho. Adjacent to it is a two-meter-tall white mchod rten called Sri gcod bum pa, which is believed to offer special protection to women against still births and to bestow children on barren women, as well as to cure general health problems. Beside this shrine is a pile of the personal effects of pilgrims, primarily articles of clothing left behind by people seeking the blessings of the Sri gcod bum pa. It is believed that by leaving something behind the ailment or problem afflicting the person is removed. About 20 meters away is the ruins of a Bon mchod rten.

In the vicinity of the ruined mchod rten is a shallow cave named bKa' brgyud phug chung, which is followed by a formation in the escarpment called Sha za mkha' 'gro'i pho brang (the Palace of the Meat-Eating Dakini). After the aforementioned gnas chen is a cave with a very small entrance called 'Dzam bha la phug, and in the escarpment above it a formation called 'Dzam bha la pho brang. The next sacred site in the storied headland is the celebrated Bar do'i 'phrang or Bar do'i 'phrang lam kyi 'dzul khung (the Narrow Passage of the Bar do Road). By passing through it, a pilgrim was putatively given a portent of the kinds of experiences he or she would face in the intermediate state after death. The passage was destroyed during the Cultural revolution and has not been rebuilt. There are many types of self-formed images found here (sTag lung rtse sprul: 18).

Continuing on the skor lam pilgrims now come to the Thang lha'i phug pa, a cave about six meters tall, six meters wide and three meters deep, as well as the gNam mtsho'i phug. The Divine Dyad is said to manifest here. They are succeeded by a series of fantastically conceived rock formations in the escarpment—namely self-manifested images of Lord Buddha and his two chief disciples (Gu ru gtso 'khor gsum) followed by Sangs rgyas stong sku (1,000 Buddhas). Opposite these rang byung images near the lake shore is the bKra shis do khrus sgo which is marked by a cairn. This is the holy bathing place on the east side of gNam mtsho where pilgrims conduct their ablutions. The ritual use of water here, either for washing or drinking, is believed to usher in the blessings of the goddess gNam mtsho phyug mo. The sité is also a popular place for the

worship of rDo rje phag mo.

Proceeding on, in the cliffs of bKra shis do chung is the 'Jam dpal dbyangs phug, a small cave only about three meters long, one meter wide and one and a half meters tall, which contains a self-formed figure of 'Jam dpal dbyang. After it comes the sTag lung thang pa'i sgrub phug, which has a zhabs rjes of dPal stag lung thang pa chen pa bkra shis dpal, the founder of the sTag lung pa sub-sect. Adjacent to this cave, and under the same ledge, is another cave some call Gu ru rin po che bzhugs khri. Continuing along the circumambulatory trail, one encounters a boulder with a self-formed Tibetan letter 'A' in it, which is said to be easily discernible to the virtuous. Following this is the sDig sgrib chen chung gi 'jams min, a place where defilements of all kinds are conquered. Next in the circuit is the bsKal pa'i mi tshad lta sa khug (the Nook of the Secret View of the Measure of a Man's Aeons), a narrow cave about 10 meters long. Some 'brog pa report that this cave might have once been called bsKal pa'i mi tshe Lhasa red, an epithet for Lord gShen rab by the Bon po. Beside it are two small round holes in the escarpment which, according to legend, signal long life if a person can reach them simultaneously with both hands. This should be an easy feat for a person of tall stature.

Next comes a fissure in the escarpment said to be made when Pha dam pa senge backed up into it. Inside it is a rang byung image of the dakini Ma cig la ba sgron. Some 'brog pa say that this is where gShen rab mi bo che manifested, a patently artificial attempt to integrate Bon mythology into the bKra shis do gnas chen. Though apocryphal, this legend does demonstrate a certain eclecticism among the local shepherds. In the vicinity are four castellations on the top of the escarpment called Shi gson byi ma'i la rtse (the Sandy Mountain Peaks of Life and Death), the significance of which is obscure. The next legendary place consists of two boulders, each less than two meters tall, which are supposed to be self-formed images of Las kyi bu chung dkar nag (the Little Boys of Black and White Karma). These archaic personalities represent sin and virtue. Their names are related to the Tibetan custom of calling virtuous activities las dkar and bad activities las nag.

The Las kyi bu chung dkar nag is followed by a cave, the name of which is unclear, and then by a cave called Dam pa'i rdo zhun phug (the Cave of the Holy Man of Melted Stone). Pilgrims now arrive at the bDe mchog yab yum, a distinctive landmark consisting of two columns of stone resting against each other. At their base is a zhabs rjes of Gu ru rin po che and one of a Bon po, perhaps Dran pa nam mkha'. These sacred footprints were supposed to have been formed when the two saints passed each other while making skor ba in opposite directions. Near the zhabs rjes of Gu ru rin po che is a place where pilgrims grind away at the limestone and collect the resulting light colored powder as byin brlabs.

Near the bDe mchog yab yum, in the escarpment, is a small cave called Pad sdong phug (Lotus Tree Cave). In it, on the surface of the rock, are small ribs which some pilgrims believe contain self-formed figures of Gu ru rin po che, 1,000-armed Avalokitesavara, 'Gro 'dul phyag bzhi (Four-armed Avalokitesvara), and gNam mtsho'i

phyug mo'i mkha' 'gro klu gdong ma. This last figure probably provides an insight into the ancient identity of this cave. In the distant past the klu would have figured more prominently in the sacred geography of the circuit, as the naga-faced image suggests. It is likely that instead of bodhisattvas, all of the ribs originally represented serpent deities. The next feature of the skor lam is a small hole in the cliff where a rDzogs chen lama discovered gter ma.

Near the site of gter ma circular ripples in the escarpment are called mKha' 'gro'i 'ja' 'od gur khang (the Dakini's Rainbow Light Tent House). Beyond this formation is a single pinnacle called Gu ru'i khrus bum (Gu ru rin po che's ablution vase) and at its base is a depression called the self-formed wash basin (Khrus sder) of Gu ru rin po che. Nearby is the gNam mtsho dar lcog, the prayer flag mast erected in 1991 for the Year of the Sheep celebration. In the vicinity is a huge rock, seemingly suspended between two faces of the escarpment, called O rgyan gyi tshogs phul. This is supposed to represent a tshogs offering made by Gu ru rin po che. Below this intriguing geological formation is a self-formed image of Phyag rdor klu 'dul la, the subduer of the klu.

We now come to the bKra shis rtags brgyad phug, a cave said to contain self-manifested images of the eight auspicious symbols.[21] These symbols are supposed to be found in a polished outcrop in the cave floor. This outcrop must have represented a deity or some other figure in the past because it is decorated with a fine linear pattern and other designs painted with a red ochre pigment. On the wall of the cave are four circular holes said to be the footprint of a giant khyung. Also on the cave wall is a spectacularly clear 'self-formed' 30-centimeter-tall engraved image of a stupa called mchod rten dkar po and a flaming jewel (nor bu me 'bar). This stupa was crafted by hand long before living memory, which explains its magical associations. With its broad base and small bum pa, a mchod rten painted in red ochre (btsag dmar) mimics the form of the rang byung mchod rten (fig. 1). Another painting is described as having a human face and the lower part of its body as terminating in the tail of a scorpion (Suolang: no. 176).[22] Its function and identity are elusive.



fig. 1

The most skilfully executed rock painting in the bKra shis rtags brgyad phug is one of a hunter on horseback pursuing a stag and hind (fig. 2) which adeptly captures the vitality and suspense of the hunt. The hunter in the lower part of the composition is well armed with both a bow and arrows and a spear. He is taking aim at the powerfully built stag facing in the opposite direction straight above him. Both the stag and the hind beside him are straight limbed indicating that they are standing

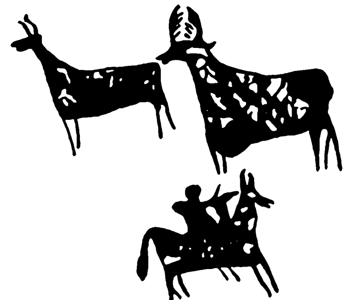
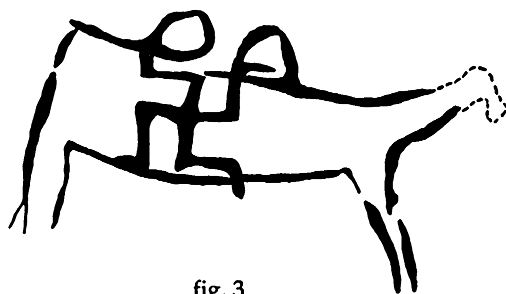


fig. 2

still, frozen in fear, while the angle of the horse's body communicates that the hunter is sallying forth towards them. The realistically portrayed figures are filled with solid color, although over the centuries a portion of the pigment has flaked away. This painting is unusual at bKra shis do in that it was made with a black pigment, which is far less common than red pigment. This black pigment is generically called sa nag by the 'brog pa.

Above the hunting scene are two much larger and less skilfully drawn unidentifiable ungulates. These figures appear in outline form, and were painted in a black pigment in a less refined style and most probably in an earlier period from the hunting composition. The uppermost figure has had its head effaced (fig. 3). On its back are two round humps of an unknown function and within the outline of its body is a reverse or Bon g.yung drung painted in red ochre at a later date, indicated in the manner in which it has been superimposed on the animal. The dating of these cave paintings, as with all the paintings of gNam mtsho, poses serious problems for the researcher. The sheer diversity of images and their execution point to different periods of manufacture. For example, the broad, squat mchod rten represents an early style of this kind of monument, but it has not been conclusively dated. The two ungulates in the upper composition were probably executed before the 13th century, because the g.yung drung superimposed on one of them was almost certainly painted before the Bon po were completely dislodged from the area. However, if their primitivism is any indication, they are many centuries older.


fig. 3

Past the bKra shis rtags brgyad phug is the Las kyi sko phug (Cave of Destiny), which contains a number of passages which presage one's path after death. These include an approximately six-meter-long and narrow dead-end passage called Tsha dmyal dang grang dmyal (the Hot and Cold Hells), dMyal mun nag gling (the Hell of Black Darkness), and bDe can gyi lam (Heaven's Road), an opening in the roof of the cave. The most auspicious passage, however, is the one on the west side of the cave which leads back to the skor lam. At the entrance to this passage is sDig pa'i 'dzul khung (the Sinner's Passage), a small passage in the escarpment which only those free of sin and small in girth can pass through. Above this passage is a self-formed image of 'Jigs byed (Yamantaka) and a prostrate image of Dus mtshan ma surmounted by a standing bDe mchog with many arms (sTag lung rtse sprul: 18). Nearby is a hand print of the saint Do pa dar she (sTag lung rtse sprul: 18). The next cave purportedly has a zhabs rjes at its entrance belonging to the renowned 'Bri gung skyab pa. It is followed by the dBu ma phug, with three clefts in the rear of the cave which represent the three main subtle

energy channels in the human body (srog rtsa rin po). Meditation in this cave putatively aids the transference of consciousness after death. Somewhere in the vicinity are a Maitreya zhabs rjes, rTa mgrin rang byung, Phyag na rdo rje with the wings of a khyung rang byung and Gu ru rin po che's gsang lam (secret road), a band of white rock (sTag lung rtse sprul: 18).

The next cave is Srin po'i ro rdo rgyag sa phug (the Underworld Cave of the Thrown Stone Corpse of the Srin po). This cave consists of two parallel passages which lead to a central chamber. Legend has it that Gu ru rin po che killed a dangerous srin po here, which is still visible in the form of the cave. Pilgrims traditionally enter the left-hand passage and throw a stone into the right-hand passage, a symbolic act re-enacting the defeat of the srin po. In the central chamber are hoof prints of dPal ldan lha mo's mule, Thang lha'i lha g.yag dkar po, and the protector Dam can skye bu bzang po.

The skor lam now completes a turn to the east as it rounds the headland to the north side of the escarpment. dMyal ba'i skas dza (Steps to Hell) is the next gnas chen encountered, comprised of four small fissures set in a vertical row. The function and name of this formation are puzzling. The next cave is sDig bshag phug (To Exchange Sin Cave), which has a unique entrance divided in half horizontally by a rock partition. Continuing on the holy circuit, pilgrims now arrive at the Ye shes mtsho rgyal phug, a deep cave most famous for its self-formed image of the top of Gu ru rin po che's skull, which is a little larger than life size. Reportedly, the cave also boasts other rang byung as well. It contains a sacred secret path (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). Nearby is another token Bon po phug, a shallow cave.

The next cave is Mna' bshags phug (the Exchange of Oath Cave), a shallow cave containing a text hundreds of words long written in fine small dbu can letters with black pigment. Near this cave one encounters the rTa rkyang po'i zhabs rjes, the hoof print of gLing ge sar's horse-rkyang. In close proximity is a zhabs rjes of Ye shes mtsho rgyal. This zhabs rjes is followed by a long stretch on the circumambulatory trail without caves or other sacred features. The next gnas chen after the break in caves and holy sites is a shallow cave named Kar ma zhwa dmar dbu zhwa gter bzhes sa (the Place Where the Kar ma bka' brgyud Zhwa dmar pa Received His Treasure Hat), which refers to the place where the Zhwa dmar pa discovered his trademark red hat. An unmistakable feature of the skor lam is sDig pa'i khur bo bab sa rdo phung (the Heap of Stones Descended from the Load of Sins), a pile of stones 15 meters long, four meters wide, and over one meter tall, and growing in size regularly. Pilgrims created this pile of stones by hauling a stone each from sDig bshag phug as a means of purging sin. Next to this cave is the zhabs rjes of the siddha gNam mtsho chen po and, nearby, sGrol ma phug with the 21 Taras self-manifested in the rock of the cave.

Inside sGrol ma phug there are important cave paintings. There are yaks, horses, a stag, other animals, a mchod rten, a man on horseback chasing 'brong, and unidentified lines and blotches, all drawn with red ochre. Apparently created over the course of

many centuries, the paintings have a jumbled appearance. Most of the paintings were made in a rudimentary manner and the pigment has run, producing an unkempt look. Like all the artwork at bKra shis do, the paintings are monochromic. The most notable animal compositions are a stag with prominent branched antlers and a yak with a curved back painted in a dark red pigment (Suolang: no. 179). These are both solid figures painted by different individuals. Flanking the stag are two much smaller figures, perhaps painted by the same artist who depicted the stag. The upper one appears to be a man on horseback and the lower figure is an ungulate. One of the mchod rten is composed of three tall tiers topped by a small, squat bum pa with a square niche, the only area of the painting devoid of pigment (fig. 4). The bum pa in turn is surmounted by a spire, which is strongly segmented by four horizontal lines. Unfortunately, the very top of the mchod rten is blurred and it cannot be distinguished whether its finale is a sun and moon or the Bon bya ru bya gri.[23]

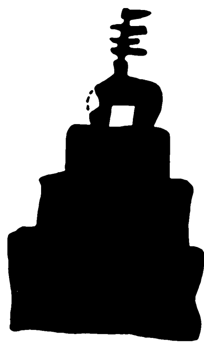


fig. 4

A sun with eight rays has been sketched to the right of the mchod rten (Suolang: no. 178). Another crudely depicted mchod rten is different in style and recalls those used to enshrine relics (sku gdung mchod rten) (fig. 5). This specimen is drawn in outline and sits on a base with three tapering tiers on top of it. The round bum pa has a large, roundish niche in the middle surmounted by a very thick truncated spire topped by a clumsily drawn banner. The finale consists of what appears to be a bya ru. The style of this mchod rten seems to belong to the Bon po and can tentatively be dated back to the early period of Buddhism in Tibet. A protuberance on the left side of the bum pa is probably where the pigment was smeared.

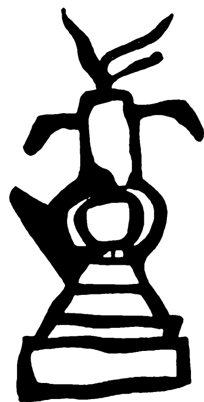


fig. 5

In reference to the character of prehistoric religion in the region, one of the most important paintings at bKra shis do depicts an anthropomorphic and ornithomorphic figure together (fig. 6). The human figure is in a supine position with its arms at its sides and its legs bent at the knees. The bird-like figure has an hourglass-shaped torso and long wings shaped like arms. Its beak is long and sharp and it has a tuft of feathers or a crown-like object on its head. It incorporates both human and avian elements in its form and resembles a vulture or eagle. This figure, standing erect and probably in mid-air, is grasping the head of the human figure who appears to be suspended effortlessly from its right wing. This composition has been interpreted as possibly representing a celestial burial (Suolang Wandui: no. 180). This interpretation is corroborated



fig. 6

by the rigid, inanimate and vulnerable position (suggestive of death) of the human figure. The ornithomorphic figure is clearly in the dominant position and appears to be gesturing with its left wing in the direction in which it is pulling the human figure. This painting seems to substantiate legends of a species of khyung in ancient times being involved with death. It also furnishes valuable evidence that originally sky burial in Tibet was more than a utilitarian means of disposing of corpses.[24]

The presence of a bird-like deity in the afterlife experience indicates that the celestial realm was not the haunt of cosmogonic deities alone, but also a resting place or parallel existence for the dead. This deity supports the view that the gnam or celestial realm was identical to a heaven.[25] It has been theorized that in the pre-Buddhist period the vulture was a messenger of heaven who carried the soul up to the sky after it consumed the corpse. According to aged colleagues if a white vulture (bya rgod thang dkar) first appears at a sky burial—a rare occurrence—it is a very good omen because this sacred messenger of the 'lord of heaven' will conduct the soul to the highest heaven (Xiong and Tai: 102,103). Furthermore, it is believed that the black vulture (bya rgod nag po) is less auspicious and interment is inauspicious because the soul of the deceased will fall into hell. It is also speculated that, due to its sacred status, the vulture may have been a totemic bird (Xiong and Tai: 95,96).

Did each tribe or clan have alternative theriomorphic deities to aid them to the next world, or is the composition depicted here a deity with a universal application in the region? Another question is whether this deity is also a personified form of either member of the Divine Dyad? It is also unknown to which specific time period and cultural phase this painting belongs. Specific answers unfortunately are unavailable due to our sketchy understanding of prehistoric Tibet. Unquestionably, the figure is pre-Buddhist and not identifiable with any assimilated Bon or Buddhist deity. This is evident not only in the subject matter but in the clarity of the pigment and the fineness of its execution.

A prevalent belief in Tibet is that, in pre-Buddhist times, horrible demonic creatures seized and devoured the dead.[26] While such a horrific scenario cannot be categorically disproven from the archaeological data available, it is clearly not represented here. The ornithomorphic deity is depicted as a noble and unthreatening presence. The body and gestures suggest neither aggression nor malice. Furthermore, the figure it leads shows no signs of struggle or fear. The significance of the ornithomorphic deity also revolves around the probability that it is the precursor or a formative element in the origins of certain contemporary sky-bound deities. According to our present knowledge of ancient Tibetan culture, there were three likely destinations after death: 1) to the realm of the underworld; 2) to a ye, gung, gnam, dmu or some other kind of celestial paradise; and 3) to a void-like or primordial state.

The face of an ancient conflict is also poignantly depicted inside sGrol ma phug. Several men on foot and on horseback are joined in a battle fought with bows and arrows and apparently other weapons (fig. 7). The cavalrymen hold either pikes or

standards upright on their horses. Conflict worldwide has been a great shaper of history and gNam mtsho is apparently not exempt. The scope of the battle, its participants and time frame are all unknown quantities. We can ascertain, however, that the composition is pre-Buddhist because the tone, quality and condition of its pigment are very similar to the human and bird-like figures above. It may be representative of localized clan warfare or it could depict a scene from a much broader conflict. It is significant that the battle pits a cavalry attired in slimmer profile garments or armor against foot soldiers dressed in bulky robes. This suggests that the confrontation was between two very different kinds of people, with different cultures and technologies. The theme of horsemen versus foot soldiers in the painting might also chronicle the arrival of the horse in the region.



fig. 7

One of the most evocative compositions at gNam mtsho is also found in the sGrol ma phug. This portrays an anthropomorphic figure standing in close proximity to a yak (fig. 8). This composition has been interpreted as depicting a fight between the two figures (Suolang: no 182), but an analysis of it reveals that something very different is taking place. The anthropomorphic figure, probably representing a human being, is extending his right hand over the yak's head and his right foot is touching or nearly touching a front hoof of the yak; in body language they are in close correspondence with one another. There is no sign of a weapon impaling the yak, and the animal is not alarmed. If the yak was alarmed or injured, its head and body would have been depicted in a far more defiant or defensive pose. Inter alia, a hunter intent on bringing down a yak still on its feet would at all costs avoid making tactile contact with an animal that could tear him to shreds with its horns or easily trample him. On the contrary, the contact between this person and animal seems non-threatening. A more likely explanation of the scene is that it shows a person feeding or petting the animal, perhaps taming it (phyugs 'dul). This may be indicative of proto-pastoralism, an early stage in the culture of the 'brog pa when the process of domestication of the native species of bovid occurred.



fig. 8

Also in the sGrol ma phug is a historically valuable inscription written in red ochre which reads: "sKyo rten po rdo phug du gtang ngo do phug ni lha 'dre rnams kor,"

translating as: "Those seeking solitude are sent to this cave where the cycles of lha and 'dre reside." This passage, with its unusual language and phrasing, is of an indeterminate age. It is either connected with early Bon or an autonomous cult concerned with the worship of the lha and 'dre and is among the best historical references which reflect the importance of these classes of deities at gNam mtsho. It would appear that after writing and Buddhism were introduced in Tibet, a preoccupation with the environment-based pantheon persisted among certain factions. Although the lha and 'dre are often viewed today as opposing each other and of a different ilk, the former equated with divinity and the latter with evil, this cannot be inferred from this passage. The lha and 'dre, by being connected to the same cycles, are strongly interrelated and are desirable to the "seekers of solitude". As we have seen, the affinity between the lha and 'dre alluded to in the sGrol ma phug inscription has survived to some extent in the contemporary beliefs of the 'brog pa.

Today as in antiquity the lha are sky-bound and the 'dre are chthonic beings, evincing the respective qualities of their spheres of residency. The point of difference, however, between the representation of the lha 'dre in the modern religion and that of the statement recorded in the sGrol ma phug is one of moral connotations. There is no reason to assume that the lha and 'dre symbolized good and evil or any other kind of moral absolutes for the author or authors of the passage. It is much more likely that they were integral parts of a weltanschauung that divided the universe into two contrasting but interconnected parts.[27]

In the escarpment next to the sGrol ma phug is the rang byung chopper of rDo rje phag mo, which is remarkably realistic. Nearby are also self-formed figures of bDe mchog, 'Jigs byed, rGwa lo rin po che's phyag rjes and a sky blue Hum' (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). About five meters further on is a Bon po zhabs rjes. The last sacred site on the bKra shis do chung circuit before returning to the plain that divides the headland range is the mKha' 'gro gsang lam (Secret Path of the Dakinis), a linear break in the rocky bench running between the escarpment and the lake shore. Adjacent to it are many tiny footprints of the dakinis in stone. There is also dakini writing and treasures which can help one dispel enemies, and a self-manifested rDo rje legs pa (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). In the middle of the plain separating bKra shis do chung and bKra shis do chen, which is generically called Har kab in the local language, is a mani wall, and a byang chub mchod rten (peerless stupa) rebuilt in 1995. Situated in the middle of the ma ni wall is a phyag rjes of Rang byung rdo rje, the third Karma pa, one of the most famous and convincing of the self-formed images of bKra shis do.

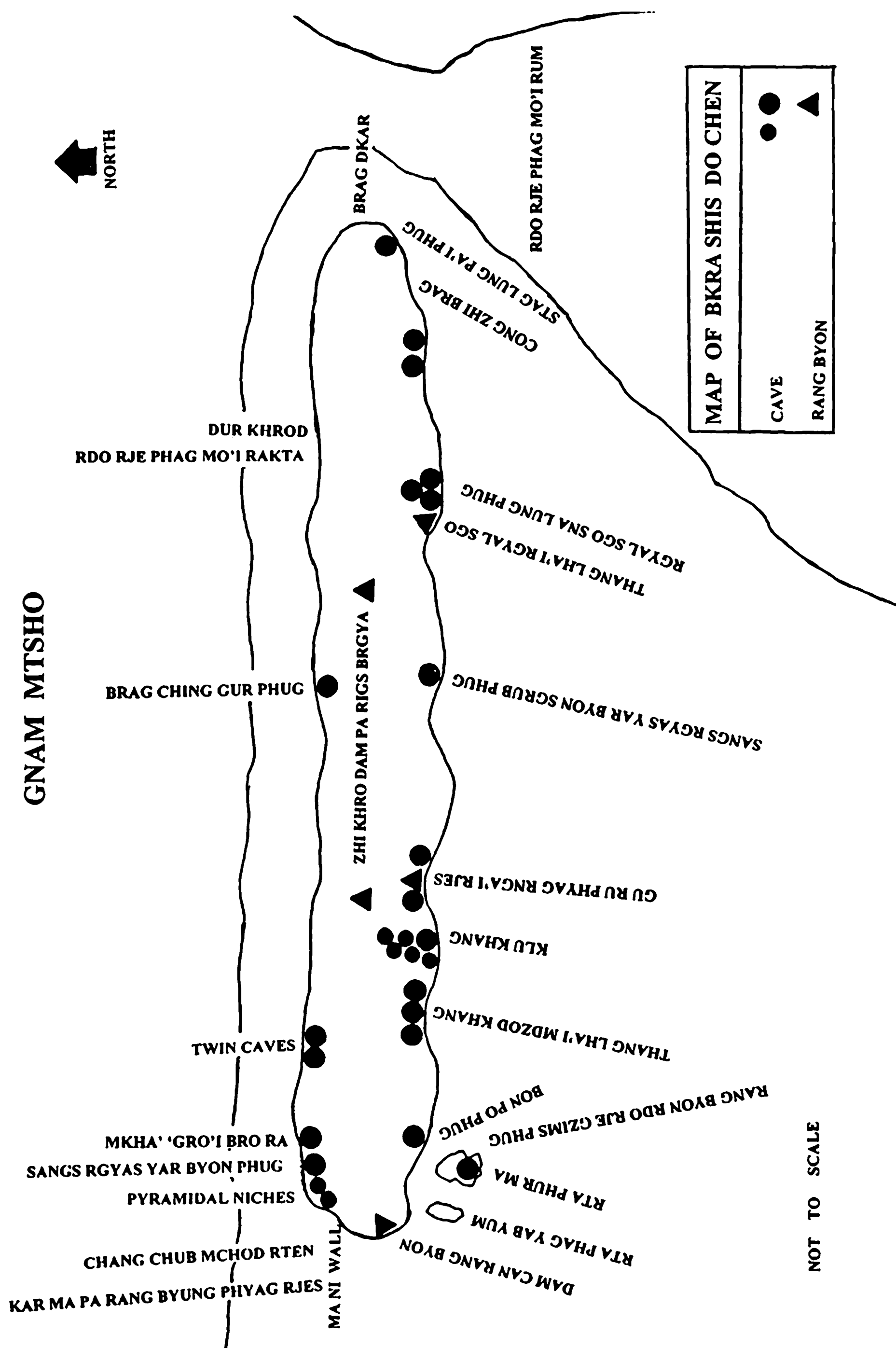
This concludes our survey of the bKra shis do chung skor lam yet, it is by no means complete. To specify every sacred site is impossible because they are envisioned as being so vast that they are beyond enumeration (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19,20). This is one of the cornerstones of sacred geography: it can never be fully quantified. At bKra shis do, the amount of byin brlabs and rang byung are simply unimaginable, which is a reflection of the holiness and majesty of the place.

For Tibetans, especially local 'brog pa, bKra shis do is imbued with formidable sanctity. Its stones, caves and cliffs have come to be equated with the deities of Bon and Buddhism. The rock has, in essence, become their very flesh and the self-manifested images signs of their power and presence. By investing the headland with the popular divinities and religious conceptions, in addition to its association with historical figures, the site has assumed an identity transcending its physical form and is symbolic of the most cherished beliefs of the 'brog pa. As such, bKra shis do is a temple just as holy as those fashioned by humans. It is not, however, merely an improvised symbol of the Tibetan religion; its purpose is more defined than this. The primary function of the gnas chen is as an instrument to aid the process of self-improvement and enlightenment. The rang byung are not merely a spectacle or simple proof of the existence of the gods or saints; they are signposts to orient the pilgrim's mind towards beneficial thoughts, feelings, impulses and motivations. The rang byung and byin brlabs are the agents of positive change and transformation experienced by the pilgrim. Their internalization as objects of devotion is far more important than their physical presence.

The psychological and soteriological dimensions of bKra shis do are clearly portrayed in the number of its gnas chen preoccupied with the erasure of sins and defilements. Some of these, like sDig pa'i dzul khung and sDig pa'i khur bo bab sa rdo phung, require active physical participation, as does the act of skor ba itself. Successful completion of the circuit is dependent on both mind and body, and thus is a fully integrated devotional exercise. The exertion required of the pilgrimage functions to purify sins and to empower the pilgrim spiritually and is therefore a complete form of worship. The skor lam is a metaphor for transmigratory existence, with its interminable cycles of rebirth and liberation from it.

The sacred aura of bKra shis do is an age-old phenomenon. Doctrinal and ritual interpretations of the nature and form of this sanctity have undergone a process of evolution, which reflects the cultural development of Tibet. From a haunt of elemental spirits to enshrining complex Vajrayana deities, bKra shis do is paradigmatic of 'brog pa spirituality. This continuity of place, perception and conviction is the foundation of the religious tradition at bKra shis do.

Despite bKra shis do being under the auspices of the rNying ma pa sect, the pilgrimage is a nonsectarian one, open to all Tibetan Buddhists as well as Bon po. In addition, the gnas chen is also far more durable than buildings. During the Cultural Revolution, when every temple at gNam mtsho was savagely decimated, the caves and sacred formations of the headland for the most part survived intact, serving as vital ratification of the beliefs of the 'brog pa. The agelessness and indestructibility of sites like bKra shis do are the physical and psychological ground of the A pa hor culture.


MAP OF BKRA SHIS DO CHEN
CAVE
RANG BYON
NORTH
BRAG DKAR
RDO RJE PHAG MO'I RUM
STAG LUNG PA'I PHUG
CONG ZHI BRAG
DUR KHROD
RDO RJE PHAG MO'I RAKTA
RGYAL SGO SNA LUNG PHUG
THANG LHA'I RGYAL SGO
GNAM MTSHO
ZHI KHRO DAM PA RIGS BRGYA
BRAG CHING GUR PHUG
SANGS RGYAS YAR BYON SGRUB PHUG
GU RU PHYAG RNGA'I RJES
KLU KHANG
THANG LHA'I MDZOD KHANG
TWIN CAVES
BON PO PHUG
RANG BYON RDO RJE GZIMS PHUG
MKHA' 'GRO'I BRO RA
SANGS RGYAS YAR BYON PHUG
RTA PHUR MA
PYRAMIDAL NICHES
RTA PHAG YAB YUM
CHANG CHUB MCHOD RTEN
DAM CAN RANG BYON
KAR MA PA RANG BYUNG PHYAG RJES
MANI WALL
NOT TO SCALE

bKra shis do chen-Introduction

The skor lam of bKra shis do chen is less frequented by pilgrims and contains far fewer rang byung images. It does however, constitute one of the Byang thang's most valuable historical and prehistoric resources. The multiform rock art enshrined in its caves provides an unprecedented view into the cultural past of the region (see Appendix One).

One of the most perspicacious perspectives on the rock paintings of gNam mtsho came from the Se ra phyes scholar rGan rdo grags, a 'brog pa himself, who inspected photographs of them.[28] His comments provide an excellent backdrop for an investigation into the cave paintings. This eminent scholar remarked that, as a rule, the paintings were made by the ancestors of the present day 'brog pa[29] who, in the prehistoric period, practiced a kind of Bon which generally "was a good religion". By a good religion the scholar meant that it admirably served the spiritual needs of the ancient community and had few, if any, practices which would nowadays be labelled degenerate. The scholar added that the paintings reflect a wholesome society, one in fact that is better balanced than contemporary society. The people who made the paintings were generally honest but proud and warlike, possessing a martial culture. Finally, rGan do grags stated that the cultural and religious material depicted served as a foundation for the subsequent social and intellectual development of Tibetans. He believes the paintings are not mere isolated examples but clear indications of the historical stages of Tibetan cultural development.

This somewhat idealized perspective of the rock paintings is in contrast with the more frequently encountered perspective among Tibetans that negates or ignores their historical importance. Among the native scholars who inspected photographs of the rock art of gNam mtsho and other areas of the Byang thang and who appreciated their historical value are sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag and rTse sprul thub bstan rgyal mtshan. Although these scholars evinced a strong interest in rock art in the pre-Communist period, it was not a subject of serious study or speculation for Tibetan scholars in general.

The perceptions tend to fall into two main categories, which are often intriguingly held simultaneously, despite inherent contradictions. One set of perceptions revolves around the thinking that until Buddhism came to Tibet, Tibetans were living in abject ignorance and sin. This view perpetuates the attitude that pre-Buddhist culture is contemptible and must be altered or even discarded in favor of Buddhist ideals. The other set of perceptions is colored by the prevalent belief in the cyclical nature of history, which propounds that we are now living in a degenerate age which was preceded by ages of superior cultural and intellectual development. Ironically, this kind of historical model was borrowed from Indian cosmological thought but is used as a rationale by Tibetans to take pride in their ancient heritage and achievements. The ancient past thus merges with Indian concepts such as the bskal pa rdzogs ldan, the first and most virtuous

aeon of the universe. These two categories of perception have a direct bearing on how an individual is disposed towards the rock paintings.

The tradition of rock painting at gNam mtsho is no longer alive and is not therefore subject to contemporary comparisons. This means, among other things, that its method of manufacture can only be theoretically reconstructed. An analysis of the petroglyphic paintings reveals that two basic methods were used to create them. One involved painting single lines of varying thickness to produce an outline and sometimes a stippling effect within the body of the composition. To accomplish this, pigment was applied on a stick, bone or antler, which had wool or hair affixed to the end. A readily distinguishable variation is the use of a solid piece of ochre, like a crayon. This technique creates very fine lines which have sharper edges and less tonal value than those painted with a prepared pigment using a tool of application. The other basic method was used to create silhouetted images by dabbing pigment with a wad of wool, rope or brush. The cave art at bKra shis do was made over many centuries by countless different people, so the specific techniques used to create them would have varied considerably. As regards the two basic methods of manufacture, in certain instances they conceivably could have been used together.

The compositions vary greatly in content and execution. Animals, especially in connection with hunting and pastoralism, are a major theme, reflecting their vital importance to the inhabitants of the Byang thang. Domestic and wild yaks, horses, rkyang, other ungulates, a variety of birds and carnivores are depicted. The second of the nine vehicles of Bon, sNang gshen bon, contains invocational chants in nine voice modulations mimicking animals and birds (skad gcong dgu)(Dagkar: Ms-A). A favorite theme is a hunter on horseback chasing his prey armed with a bow and arrow or with a spear or pike. As common and evocative as the theme of hunting is, it is the subject of only about one quarter of the total number of non-Buddhist compositions, a much lower percentage than in the petroglyphs of the central and western Byang thang.[30] This is due to the fact that many if not all the paintings were made subsequent to the introduction of pastoralism as the major form of subsistence.

Precisely when the domestication of animals like the yak, sheep and goat supplanted hunting as the staple economic activity is not known, but indications are that it occurred no later than 1000 B.C.E. (see Appendix Two). Hunting remained an important adjunct to the Byang thang way of life long after this period until the Communist period and the mass slaughter of wild animals that ensued. To this day, hunting as sport and economic activity is still practiced by a minority of 'brog pa.[31] With the possible exception of the earliest strata of paintings, hunting was thus not a central activity attested to by the large number of non-hunting motifs.[32] The incidence of hunting compositions probably tailed off gradually through the Buddhist period.

Much of the cave art is concerned with social activities, exemplifying a way of life that had moved beyond the confines of hunting and gathering to embrace a diverse range of endeavors, many of which were not directly linked to subsistence. We find

dancers, worshippers, war, contests, ritual expressions, and a number of priestly or spirit figures.

The art of bKra shis do cannot be approached in monolithic fashion, in terms of pre-Buddhist and Buddhist people and periods since it is far too varied for this. The same proviso that applies to chronology applies to culture. Although it is accurate to see most of the paintings as the work of indigenous people, their development over the millennia was marked by distinctive cultural phases. The cultures of A pa hor of the Stone Age, the Metal Age and of the pre-Buddhist Zhang zhung period formed distinctive worlds which displayed varying physical environments and cultural affinities.

The most comprehensive study of both cave paintings and petroglyphs undertaken to date in Tibet expresses the opinion that the oldest specimens date back to the Early Metal Age, approximately 3,000 years ago (Li and Huo: 33).[33] This date is based on three suppositions: 1) categorically pastoralism was already practiced when rock art developed; 2) all petroglyphs were made with metal tools; and 3) the similarity of the petroglyphs to those found at Central Asian Metal Age graves (Li and Huo: 33). A contending view, however, maintains that the petroglyphs of the rGya gling (Jialin) site in Rong ma township, O'm bu county, could date back as far as the Neolithic (Hu Xu Tru: ch. 5). The present study also calls into question the origins of Tibetan rock art in the Metal Age. Although the overwhelming number of paintings found at gNam mtsho chronologically conforms to the Metal Age or subsequent periods, there are several notable exceptions which indicate that painting in the region began earlier, probably in the New Stone Age.

On the opposite end of the chronological spectrum are paintings with hunting motifs which could well postdate the introduction of Buddhism, when hunting remained a viable traditional economic activity. A comparative study of petroglyphs supports the thesis that by no means all the hunting scenes at bKra shis do are pre-Buddhist. The difficulty lies in distinguishing archaic paintings from later ones. This is not always feasible because of the possibility that some of the paintings represent an anachronistic style maintained for many centuries.

To understand the historical significance of these paintings, their place in the rock art of Inner Asia must be considered. We know that petroglyphs found at the edge of the Tibetan plateau in Qinghai, Gansu, La dwags and Beloristan were subject to influences from an amalgam of different cultures from the Bronze Age onwards. The northwestern and northeastern edges of the Tibetan plateau have been great hubs for the movement and dispersal of peoples throughout the last 4,000 years. This process, characterized by assimilation and displacement, naturally enriched the contents of the petroglyphs. In the historical period this cultural multiplicity, for example, in La dwags is represented by inscriptions found in Sogdian, Nestorian and Tibetan. Likewise, in Indus Kohistan, there is an even greater wealth of multilingual inscriptions. Moreover, in terms of art, northern Pakistan has proven affiliations with Siberia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan and the

Pamirs. However, when we turn to the rock paintings of gNam mtsho we find no such wealth of foreign inscriptions. The dynamic, fluid and refined portrayals of animals characteristic of Zhou Dynastic bronzes or of the intricate animal ornamentation of Han jade sculptures found elsewhere in cave art are absent from bKra shis do. Likewise, evidence of the renowned Eurasian animal style of the Scythians and Sakas is so attenuated as to be virtually undetectable at bKra shis do. Furthermore, bKra shis do has no mascoids associated with the Siberian Okunev culture, which have wide distribution in Inner Asia.

Nevertheless, because of a common nomadic culture, broad structural connections (especially in the earliest period) with other Inner Asian petroglyphs are indicated. The strongest areas of cross-cultural affinity are to be found in Turko-Mongolian and Himalayan rimland rock carvings. However, the evidence weighs in favor of the majority of paintings representing a distinctive local medium developed and exercised within the region. This suggests that, compared to the periphery of the plateau, gNam mtsho was a backwater region throughout much of history (as it is today) and an area of extreme cultural conservatism. Unquestionably, the closest affinities lie with other petroglyphic sites to the west on the Byang thang.

Taken as a whole, the rock paintings of bKra shis constitute a genre of rock art, defined by location, that can be called native Byang thang. It is characterized by varying levels of naivety versus refinement in form and technique, and features the yak, khyung, swastika and other cultural emblems of the region. While it is representative of a particular locale, it exhibits a dozen or more stylistic and chronological strains. Despite the fact that bKra shis do art defies simple categorization, as a whole it can be sharply contrasted, for example, with the classic steppe art discovered on the Byang thang. Outstanding differences in form and ornamentation are seen between bKra shis do paintings and steppe art as represented by the leopard and deer petroglyph of Ri mo gdong in Ru thog county (Suolang: no. 30).

In order to understand the cultural value of the rock paintings, the possible motivations behind their production must be discerned. With such a large compositional and chronological variety the painters involved must have acted under various compulsions and inspirations. Pre-Buddhist compositions depicting the hunting of animals are probably connected to magico-religious rites and celebration. For early humans the placation and amity of natural forces like the Divine Dyad were perceived as essential to the process of hunting. A contemporary version belief system is the 'brog pa practice of making offerings to yul lha to help bring results when hunting and to protect them from the wrath of the yul lha should they transgress him or her whilst hunting.

The painting of hunting scenes might have fulfilled a similar purpose—to bring about concord with the natural forces, to protect the hunter, and to secure an abundant take in the hunt. More specifically, hunting magic in relation to the paintings might

have functioned as: 1) the glorification and veneration of the animals depicted; 2) offerings to the divinities that protected and inhabited the animals; 3) magical devices created to capture the spirit or power of the game so that the hunters would be able to kill them; 4) celebration of the prowess and bravery of the hunter and the animals he triumphs over; 5) thanksgiving rites carried out after the hunt; 6) part of fertility rites designed to guarantee the fecundity of the prey; and 7) tribute paid to ancestors and their earlier hunting exploits.

The economy of the hunters gave rise to a belief system that reinforced the need to paint hunter and quarry. In all probability, the act of painting served several interrelated purposes which could have varied considerably through the ages. Painting, like the hunt itself, was a holistic activity expressing the way of life and ethos of the people and not an occupational specialization per se. Its origins lie in the synergistic arrangement existing between humans, animals and the supernatural. The depiction of the hunt at bKra shis do and throughout the Byang thang by its very frequency shows that painting was a vital cultural undertaking, perhaps even considered indispensable to the people and their way of life.

Hunting culture in all its complexities may have impelled the early inhabitants of the Byang thang to paint, but it cannot account for the plethora of themes not directly related to hunting found at bKra shis do. For example, portraits of people dancing or fighting indicate alternative motivations behind their portrayal. The glory or terror of the battlefield or the joys of intimate contact with one's kith and kin invoke painting as a means of offering tribute to the human and supernatural power structures that existed. These types of compositions, chronicling the social environment of the painters, might in some cases have served as pictorial records of the most momentous or pleasing episodes in their lives. As such they could have been used to edify successive generations about their cultural and historical legacy.

Or were certain paintings created as an act of devotion to ancestors or to the deities of the natural world, or to fulfil a taste for ornamentation? The walls of the caves of bKra shis do are a vast phenomenological ground representing the land, sky and water. The rock is a medium which can become any aspect of the two or three fundamental partitions of the cosmos. This all-inclusive template permitted the artist absolute liberty within the bounds of his or her cultural and cognitive worlds. Surprisingly, gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha are not graphically depicted at bKra shis do. The Divine Dyad, as we have seen, was and is a dominant force in the lives of the A pa hor, so why was it consistently omitted from the paintings? In a figurative and literal sense, the caves used for painting are themselves a microcosmic form of the Divine Dyad. The projection of the mountain and lake into the rock surfaces welded them together as one, precluding the need to artificially incorporate them into the compositions. In essence, the Divine Dyad was the very basis of these paintings.

With few exceptions, the paintings of bKra shis do are all painted in locally extracted red ochre, an iron oxide. This ferruginous pigment varies in color from red-orange to

shades of deep red and brownish red. It was either ground up and used alone or mixed with other materials to make a pigment. Reportedly adjuncts used to compound the pigments included blood and bone which produced shades of deep red or red-brown (Li and Huo: 29). Generally speaking, pigments which contained various animal products not only produce darker and richer colors but are also more durable and less susceptible to running and smudging than pure mineral pigment, since they temper the mineral pigment and act as binding agents.

As a rule, it appears that the painted inscriptions of the six syllable mantra and the names of sTag lung pa lamas and other incontrovertibly Buddhist motifs were evidently created with a pure mineral pigment, and are less permanent than earlier non-Buddhist scenes painted with a pigment containing an admixture of animal products. Buddhists found rendering sacred symbols and words with the remains of animals distasteful and irreligious. Physical and chemical analysis of the various pigments is needed to confirm these observations and to establish their composition. Presumably, the use of animal blood and bones in the pre-Buddhist period had more than utilitarian value, and was related to their magico-religious beliefs. Blood and other animal-based ingredients might have infused the drawings with the sacred qualities and powers of the animals from which they came. Perhaps it was considered that the very life or soul of the animal was transferred to the paintings by incorporating parts of it in the compositions.

One of the main attractions of painting at bKra shis do must have been the quality of the rock. The caves with the highest densities of paintings are all covered in a thin calcareous deposition. This natural veneer acted precisely in the same manner as a lime plaster prepared for frescos, furnishing a smooth, porous surface for the paintings. These deposits helped to naturally fix the compositions to the walls by absorbing some of the pigment, and tended to smooth the texture of the rock, facilitating the manipulation of the pigment. These rock paintings, at least indirectly, are the forerunners of the Tibetan temple frescos, for Tibetan painting was pioneered in these caves. In the same way petroglyphs acted as inspiration for the Buddhist rock inscriptions and bas reliefs (Chayet: 64).

In the descriptions that follow the terms right and left will refer to the perspective of an observer facing the paintings.

The Pyramidal Nooks

Leaving the Har kab plain and proceeding in a clockwise direction around the bKra shis do chen range, one encounters two pyramidal nooks side by side. The first of these (furthest west) is 1.3 meters tall and 1.8 meters wide and set no more than one meter deep into the escarpment. Its surface area was calculated as 4.6 square meters (Suo lang: no. 186). This nook faces north directly on to the lake and receives no direct sunlight. The surface of the nook, like most of the rock surfaces with paintings, is smooth and covered with a veneer of light-colored mineral deposit. The nook contains more than

four dozen depictions, which for the most part are integrated into a thematic composition. This montage exhibits fairly uniform characteristics of style and technique, which indicates that the majority of it was painted within the same cultural context and perhaps during the same period. Except for several adventitious lamaist motifs, the nook hosts folk motifs which revolve around pastoralism and the social and religious activities of the culture of the painters.

To the east of the above pyramidal nook is another similarly shaped one—a little narrower at the base but deeper than the western nook. At the base of this eastern nook is a tubular orifice 30 centimeters deep, reportedly used to grind plants in the course of making incense, but which could also have been utilized to grind and mix pigments during the painting process. The compositions in this nook bear many stylistic similarities to the western nook.

The paintings in the pyramidal nooks chronicle the way of life of the 'brog pa, with the majority of compositions exhibiting a degree of coherency found nowhere else at gNam mtsho. The unified appearance of many of the motifs suggests that they were produced collectively as a document of the cultural life of the makers, but why? Possibly they were an attempt by a non-literate people at recording history. Or the aim could well have been a less self-conscious attempt to commemorate a celebration or other special event.

An examination of the paintings shows that a vertical scheme, conforming to the vertical divisions of the universe in cosmological beliefs, was more or less adhered to. Large earthy animals like yaks tend to be depicted towards the bottom of the nook and people and birds towards the apex. The nook itself and its shape must have had symbolic value for the painters. Its shape is reminiscent of a mountain and this is what it could well have represented. Although the altitudinal hierarchy found in the nooks is loosely ordered, it is nevertheless one of the most realistically structured treatments of space found in the paintings of the grottoes of bKra shis do.

There is evidently an older layer of paintings in the western nook which harks back to an early period of human activity in the region and comprises one of the oldest examples of artistic expression known in Tibet. This genre of paintings is now limited to two distinguishable compositions, although there is evidence to suggest that the early period was better represented. This is evidenced by faint applications of pigment underneath the main body of work. These nebulous traces of ochre give no suggestion of what they once depicted. The two intact sketches, however, seem to afford a glimpse into antiquity. Both of these portrayals of animals are situated towards the middle of the composition. One depicts a bounding ungulate with a heavily built body, probably a rkyang, which has been reduced to a shadowy figure due to the ablation of the pigment over many



fig. 9

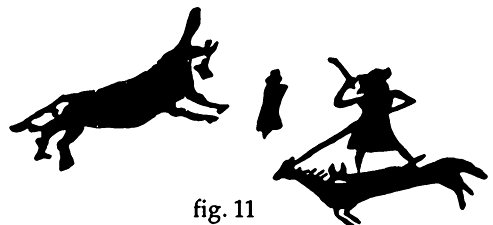
centuries (fig. 9). The head and rear of the body have been colored in, while the anterior portion is in outline form. This treatment mimics the black and tawny markings of the rkyang. The animal is painted in a bold, fluid manner with an economy of strokes, conveying an uncontrived dynamism. Its elegant simplicity is unmatched in the paintings of a later period in the nook. The style of this painting exhibits the features of Stone Age steppe art compositions and can be tentatively dated accordingly.[34]

The other animal figure from the earliest period, although it might not be as old as the preceding composition, is a yak which is reminiscent in appearance of the extinct aurochs (fig. 10). It has an elongated body, smallish head and prominent horns. The posterior of the yak has been painted over; but its complete outline is distinguishable, albeit barely. The painting was executed by a proficient artist and exhibits a fluidity seldom encountered in zoomorphic portrayals of the montage. With only two examples of the earliest period of art found at bKra shis do, it is very difficult to assess their significance. They only provide a glimpse into what is arguably one of the earliest periods of inhabitation at bKra shis do (see Appendix Three).


fig. 10

Notwithstanding the two figures examined above, the paintings in the western niche stand out boldly against the wall of the nook. This is due partly to the generally robust manner in which they were painted and partly to their heavy coloration. We will now look at the most prominent of these compositions and attempt to measure their significance. In the lowest tier of the nook is a procession of three men on horseback[35] carrying standards or a long weapon similar to a pike. These figures each average about 20 centimeters in length. The horseman to the right of the line confronts a similarly equipped horseman coming towards him. This provocative encounter may be representative of a battle or sport or, alternatively, maybe these stiffly drawn mounted figures fulfil a protective role in the composition. Another, not mutually exclusive possibility is that they represent the clans or the genealogical basis of the artist's culture. At the bottom left side of the nook is a crudely drawn man on foot hunting a deer with a bow and arrow, which was probably drawn by scratching the outline of the figures with a piece of iron oxide. The pursuit of game constitutes the single most popular theme of the rock art at gNam mtsho.

In the next tier of paintings above and to the left of the aforementioned figure is a galloping horse with a blotch of paint straddling its neck (fig. 11). To the right of it is an anthropomorphic figure without distinguishable limbs, its hair in a


fig. 11

distinctive bun (fig. 11), a popular form of hair style among sngags pa, mani pa and Tibetan yogis. To the right of this is a most intriguing composition that consists of an anthropomorphic figure standing astride a horse (fig. 11). In his left hand, he grasps what appear to be reins which are attached to the animal's head, and in his right hand he holds an instrument up to his mouth as if he is preparing to blow into it. The item in his hand resembles a dmag rung, an ancient Tibetan military horn. A 6th century historical reference to Tibetans playing reed instruments is found in the *Sui Annals* (Beckwith 1984: 106). The figure is attired in a knee-length robe and has a graceful and dramatic air. It cannot be determined if it represents a human or archaic deity figure; however, the highly acrobatic position evinces a divine character. Behind the animal on which the figure stands is a horned animal, probably a wild yak from an earlier period of painting (fig. 11), and partially underneath its rear legs is an insect figure. To the right of this composition is a blurred Om in red ochre, and to the right of it indistinguishable images including what may be a tree.

In the next tier of paintings, above the figure standing on the animal, is another anthropomorph with delicate shoulders and a robe gathered in to create a narrow waist, giving it the appearance of a woman (fig. 12). To the right of it is a creature which looks like a long-necked bird, perhaps a black-necked crane, which she appears to be apprehending with a rope-like object. In the Ge sar epic, King Ge sar is sometimes portrayed with black-necked cranes in his court. Among the Byang pa of upper La dwags is a dance called the 'Dance of the Crane', which is performed to bring happiness and prosperity (Bedi). Above the ornithomorphic figure is a bird perched with its beak pointed downward, and above this is a hovering bird with a long tail and short wings (fig. 12). Further to the right is a tree situated in the center of the nook which is composed of a single vertical line for a trunk, eight lines on its right side and nine lines on its left side which represent branches (fig. 9). Perched in the tree or flying beside it are several birds (fig. 9). The clearest two of these images have fairly long necks and swept back wings.[36]



fig. 12

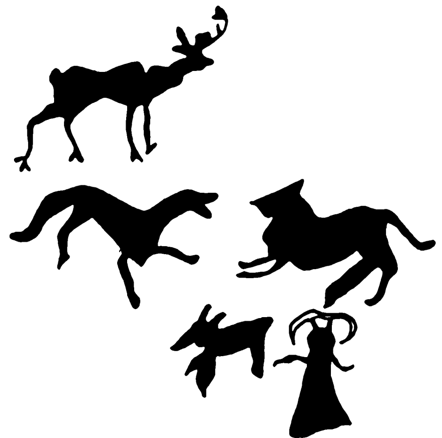
To the right of the tree is a pair of anthropomorphic figures holding hands and wearing long robes (fig. 9). The relative sizes of the figures and the holding of hands suggest that they are male and female. The smaller or female figure has had butter dabbed on her head and nether zone by pilgrims. The degeneration of the pigment is an impediment to estimating the original form of the composition. To the right of this couple, and towards the edge of the nook, is an adeptly sketched group of four complete anthropomorphic figures and two more partial ones, which average 20 centimeters in

height (fig. 10). The uppermost figure wears its hair in a bun and is attired in a long robe which is much fuller than those worn by the other figures. Two lower figures wear scarves or turbans tied at the back with the two ends clearly shown. The headgear resembles the profile of scarves worn by contemporary women in dBus gtsang. The footwear of one of the lower figures is visible and has curled toes just like the traditional boots (lham) of the 'brog pa and Tibetans of dBus gtsang. The figures seem to be holding their right arm akimbo and the left arm upwards towards their head in an attitude of greeting or benediction or, more probably, in some gesture of a dance. The uniformity in the arm positions suggests that they are involved in some type of ritual or dance.

The partial figure to the right of the composition is holding a long item in his right hand, perhaps a club or some other weapon. Only the curled boots and lower part of the robe of the lowest figure are visible. The rest was lost when the mineral deposit the compositions were painted on flaked off the cave wall. Directly above the figure to the far left and level with the head of the upper figure is what appears to be an ornithomorphic form with an arrow-shaped object above it. The realistic treatment of the figures gives the impression that they are portraits of real people. They could represent a ruling council or a circle of priests or even a group of dancers. The fuller robe, different coiffure and placement of the uppermost figure indicate that he or she is the leader of the group (the sex of figures cannot be determined because of the lack of details and the loose clothes worn).

Directly above the group of six human figures, and near the apex of the nook, a khyung-like bird with outstretched wings and a massive body stands alone, as if watching over the montage of figures below. It has a wing span of 17.5 centimeters and is 17.5 centimeters tall; it may have originally been painted with horns. It is similar in shape to a style of khyung thog lcags found in Tibet.[37] Could this be a representation of gNyan chen thang lha? Also near the top of the nook are several ungulates and an obscured anthropomorphic figure. One geometric design consisting of circles and triangular extensions (Suolang: no. 186) resembles a gtor ma. It was painted at a later date than the adjoining animal motifs which it partially obscures. Lower down, against the left edge of the nook, is a trident-like design.[38]

At the bottom left side of the eastern nook is a figure in a long gown with a high slim waist and a large horn-like accoutrement on its head, which looks like the elaborate jewel-studded coiffures of aristocratic ladies in pre-Communist dBus and gTsang, called spa phrug and spa sgor (fig. 13). To her left is an animal with a pointed muzzle, and above her what looks like a wolf and leopard gamboling (fig. 13). Above the wolf


fig. 13

a stag has been painted (fig. 13). Higher up, and near the left side of the nook, two men riding what appear to be yaks are facing each other with lances or standards in their hands; they are contesting each other either in battle or a game. To the right of the wolf and leopard, a hunter on horseback pursues an animal with long horns, probably a deer. Above this painting and to the right, a carnivorous-looking animal is skulking, and directly above it is a g.yung drung (fig. 14).

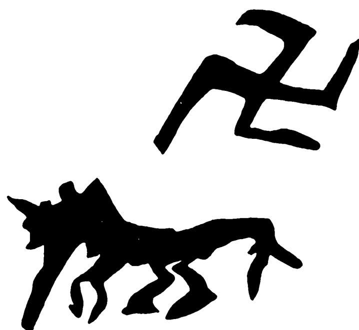


fig. 14

To the upper right hand side of the wolf and leopard is a composition of what appears to be a drawn bow and arrow, and to the right of it is a cruciform figure resembling a double rdo rje (rdo rje rgya gram) design found in thog lcags. Above these two a man on horseback is aiming his bow and arrow at a 'brong in front of him. The upper half of the nook is dominated by paintings that have faded and run. The most salient compositions include a bird perched in a tree (fig. 15) and, to the left of it, another tree with what probably is also a bird perched on its top. Below the trees a couple appears to be dancing and in the vicinity are horses with mounts. All of these figures in the upper half of the nook are painted in a simplistic, hurried fashion. On the left side of the nook and above the pair of opposed yak riders is a design consisting of three interlinked triangles with their apexes turned sideways, topped by smaller triangles with a symmetrical array of lines extending out of the top of them. The significance of this design remains unclear.

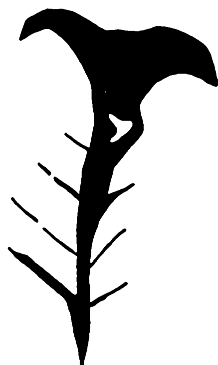


fig. 15

Adjacent to the pyramidal nooks is a cave of the great sTag lung pa lama, Sangs rgyas yar byon (1203-1272), which is said to contain his zhabs rjes. Around 400 years ago, the sTag lung lama Ngag dbang rnam rgyal composed his gtor ma offering text in this cave. In the text, he refers to the cave as bDe drod rdzul sprul phug (the Miraculous Cave of Warmth and Happiness). In front of the cave is a tubular orifice identical to the one in front of the eastern nook. Inside the cave are several zoomorphic figures drawn in outline form accompanied by two Tibetan syllables, which seem to read 'ya' and 'ma'. The letters and animals appear to have been made with the same type of pigment and brush strokes, indicating chronological uniformity. The animals are drawn with a certain sophistication and lack the rusticity of the compositions in the neighboring nooks. Below the two syllables a bird is drawn, and below it is the Tibetan letter 'ba' with a subscribed 'ya' which seems to have a vowel sign above it. Below this syllable is a horse and below it what looks like a leopard. A short distance away is a khyung, recognized by the fact that its silhouette is similar to a thog lcags design referred to as a khyung.

mKha' 'gro'i bro ra

Directly east of the sTag lung Sangs rgyas yar byon phug is an unusual cave called mKha' 'gro'i bro ra (Dance Concourse of the Dakinis).[39] Dakinis are believed to descend to this cave to dance around the pyramidal stone cairn set in the middle of it, which is called rdo mchod and is about 1.75 meters tall. The cave itself is oval-shaped, about eight meters wide and 14 meters long. The walls of the cave are between four and seven meters tall and terminate in a large gaping hole in the roof of the cave. The north wall tapers inward to create a partially sheltered space below it. Near the top of the northern wall is a small isolated hole; according to local folk tradition, pains in the limbs are cured by throwing stones through it. The semi-circular mouth of mKha' 'gro'i bro ra is on its north side, is a maximum of nearly three meters tall and five meters long at its base and faces directly on to gNam mtsho. In the south or rear of the cave is a niche large enough to comfortably accommodate one sleeping person. It is possible to climb the south wall of the cave and emerge on the top of the escarpment to overlook the Har kab plain.

The position of the rdo mchod is such that it is only completely illuminated by the sun on the summer solstice and surrounding days. Full illumination occurs on the longest days of the year, at midday when the sun is at its maximum elevation in the sky. At other times of the year, the walls of the cave block the direct passage of sunlight in the rdo mchod so that, intentionally or otherwise, mKha' 'gro'i bro ra is a marker of the summer solstice. Today the most informed 'brog pa of the area maintain that the rdo mchod, like other sacred features at bKra shis do, is an ancient monument. There is evidence that the rdo mchod was rebuilt (including small piles of stones laying about) and was added to numerous times either out of need to conserve it or as an act of devotion.

No report of it having been intentionally built so as to register the solstice or other astronomical events was obtained. However, it is difficult to imagine that the strategic placement of the rdo mchod is merely a coincidence and that its relationship to the sun was not noted. It is not unlikely that it was used in astronomico-astrological rituals to calculate the summer solstice and perhaps the equinoxes as well. It may also have been used to measure other types of calendrical parameters connected to lunar and sidereal cycles. It is improbable that the ancient residents of the Byang thang, which has the most lucid skies in the world, were not keen sky gazers, and the early Bon religion placed much stress on celestial phenomena and sky-dwelling deities (see Appendix Four).

The archaeo-astronomy of the Byang thang is a neglected topic. Even the traditional practices the herders used to keep track of time is little studied. Virtually every 'brog pa camp utilizes natural landmarks like cliffs, clefts, boulders, gorges and mountain tops as natural calendars. The movement of the sun, moon and stars are tracked in relation to local topography to order the pattern of migration and other periodic events in the 'brog pa way of life, including the birthing and mating of animals.[40]

Brag ching gur phung

The clockwise circuit around bKra shis do chen from mKha' 'gro'i bro ra skirts the north side of the escarpment for hundreds of meters offering breathtaking views of gNam mtsho. The next gnas chen is a pair of small, unnamed caves, in one of which are several paintings. These include a man mounted on a galloping horse, wearing a pointed cap in profile which resembles a Mongolian or Hor pa style hat (fig. 16). Local informants thought it looked like the hats of A pha hor leaders of yore. There is also what appears to be a blue sheep (rna) and a painted mchod rten but they are hard to distinguish, and a lone horse. Buddhist motifs include an endless knot. There is also a painting similar in design to the one in the eastern pyramidal nook that resembles a gtor ma. Structurally it suggests a primitive rgyun gyi gtor ma, an offering and support of Bon protectors (fig. 17). The Tibetan letter 'A' and other sparse fragments of writing are found in the two small caves. The six syllable mantra has been painted in a niche nearby.[41]

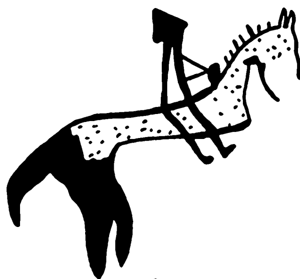


fig. 16

The circumambulatory trail passes a 'brog pa camp inhabited in the spring (dpyid sa) before arriving at the sacred cave of Brag ching gur, which is supposed to represent the self-formed image of a sleeping white dragon. The cave is also called sLob dpon gzims phug and boasts an impression of Gu ru rin po che's drum print and many melted rocks from his gtu mo practice (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). The melted rocks form a polished rock outcrop on the floor of the cave which has a flowing appearance. The entrance to the cave is marked by a cairn placed on a boulder and is situated in a red and white tower-like limestone formation which forms a rampart against the range. This cave boasts the most diverse group of paintings, in terms of both style and content, of any at bKra shis do. Brag ching gur consists of two shallow 'V'-shaped chambers. The west chamber is deeper but the east chamber contains more paintings.

The most dominant compositions are two sets of well-executed but incomplete paintings of the eight auspicious signs (bkra shis rtags brgyad) in the east chamber. The sets of eight auspicious signs have been subject to more deterioration than many of the non-Buddhist motifs, indicating that they were painted with different kinds of pigments despite superficially being the same color. The most unusual of the eight auspicious signs is a 42-centimeter-long, accurate representation of a native scaleless lake carp. In addition to the eight auspicious symbols, the eight syllable Bon mantra has been scrawled on the wall of the chamber.[42]



fig. 17

Prominent on the wall which divides the two chambers

is the mantra Om A' Hum'. This mantra can be used to purify and seal a geographical entity within a Bon or Buddhist ambit. Its presence in the middle of the cave gives the impression that it was written to help clear or exorcise the aboriginal or pre-Buddhist character of the cave and replace it with a lamaist identity. Om A' Hum' is written in many caves of bKra shis do, apparently for the purpose of reconfiguring the religious identity of the headland.



fig. 18

One of the most dramatic paintings at Brag ching gur is of a pair of fleeing deer (fig. 18), which are being pursued by a mounted hunter. The pigment has run and the deer and rider are partially obscured by a parasol and endless knot of the bKra shis rtags brgyad. All the excitement and volatility of the hunt is captured in this composition. The bodies of the deer are decorated with lines and dots which recall the variegated coat of the animal; such intensity of elaboration is seldom found in the paintings of bKra shis do, and suggests that the composition dates from a relatively late period. To the right of the deer is the speckled horse mentioned above which is painted by the same hand that painted the pair of deer, evidenced by the stylistic and compositional unity of the painting. The horse is mounted by a hunter armed with a bow and arrow who is closing in on the deer. The upper animal is a stag as shown by the horns and the lower animal a hind—a portrayal still found in contemporary textile art in the region.

The deer is more than mere quarry; it is a highly respected animal closely associated with the mythology of gNam mtsho. The 'brog pa consider the deer to be an auspicious symbol closely associated with well-being, and still incorporate it in their weaving next to endless knots and other Buddhist motifs, despite it being extinct in the region. Back strap looms, boot ties and belts to hang relic boxes (ga'u) are produced with a variety of designs including a pair of deer. Along with the pair of deer, a pair of antelope is often found in textile art. The pairing of deer and antelope for the 'brog pa conveys the fundamental ordering of the natural world into male and female parts and simulates the same principles of synergism found in the Divine Dyads.

The most popular animal in the engraved rock art of Tibet is the stag (Li and Huo: 32).[43] As part of the Shes pa bcu gnyis, the ancient systemization of Bon, is the Bon of the Rites of the Deer and the Art of Flight (lDing shes sha ba). This consists of nine categories of rites concerned with dispelling obstacles caused by elemental spirits and enemies (Norbu 1995: 175). In the origin myth of the rite of the deer, bdud, btsan, dmu, rgyal po, klu and lha are each associated with a different colored deer, bird and tree which are offered as gifts to the spirits (Norbu 1995: 176,182).[44]

Below the deer is one of the most historically intriguing paintings of Brag ching gur phug which consists of six human figures unlike any others found at gNam mtsho (fig.

19). These figures are attired in close to floor-length robes gathered tightly at the waist. The robes have elbow length sleeves, and the robe of the figure furthest to the right is decorated with cross-hatch stripes, indicating that the robes depicted are made of patterned cloth and not hide. The figures appear to be wearing turbans or some other close-fitting head-dress. The figure to the far left stands alone and is larger than the others. The other members of the group are oriented towards the second figure from the left, who seems to be hooded and has either one sword or two in close proximity. It is uncertain whether these swords are original components of the composition or later amendments. The ceremonial way in which the people are standing is suggestive of a religious or military initiation. The short-sleeved robes and turbans of the figures are reminiscent of Central Asian styles, but with only the most rudimentary features discernible a comparative study of them is problematic. Early interactions between Tibet and Central Asia are likely. For example, it is possible that at the end of the 8th century Sogdian merchants practicing Nestorianism and Manichaeism established trade communities in Tibet (Uray: 421).

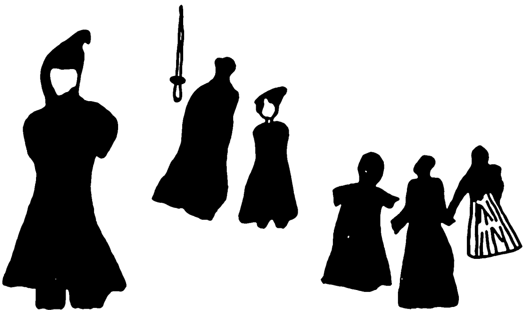


fig. 19

Below the enigmatic group of six human figures is a lone yak (Suolang: no. 203). The relative thinness of the body and its small haunches shows that it is the domesticated variety of the animal and not a 'brong. Perhaps this is a so called tshe thar, an animal which is selected from a herd to live out its life unmolested in order to bring prosperity to other members of the herd and their owners. On the same wall of the east chamber of Brag ching gur phug and below the Om' of the eight syllable mantra are three anthropomorphs standing side by side (fig. 20). The right and middle figure are painted in the same style as the six figures in the west pyramidal nook (fig. 10). They wear the same long robes gathered at the waist and a turban or scarf tied behind the head with its ends hanging down.[45] The bodies of the figures are well proportioned and realistic. The figure on the right has its right arm raised to its head as if surveying the lake. The position of its left arm is uncertain, but is at least partially extends out from the body. Its body is inclined slightly to the left and its left foot is raised indicating movement. Like the six figures in the west nook, it may be dancing. The figure in the middle has an identical form. Only a small portion of its left arm is intact, but from what



fig. 20

remains it is clear that it is gesturing this arm towards its head, the opposite arm of the figure to the right.

The heads of the three figures are at the same level but the left one, at 30 centimeters, is twice the length of the other two. Its body hangs twice as far down as its companions. Its arms strike a similar pose to the others. The left one is akimbo and the right is raised up not quite to its head. In addition to size, there are stylistic differences between the large figure and the two smaller ones. The torso of the large figure is slimmer and more graceful and its arms have more plasticity than those of the adjacent figures. Unfortunately, seepage has almost effaced this large figure. The details of its legs have been obliterated and its head is barely detectable. What can be seen of its head suggests that it is slimmer than those of its companion's and has an elongated protuberance in its crown. The size and style of the large figure indicate that it was painted separately from its neighbors. The right and middle figures seem to depict people, whereas the left figure has something of an unworldly grandeur about it; perhaps it represents a deity or other mythical being.

The three figures in Brag ching gur phug and the six of the west nook all look out to the north on to gNam mtsho. This north-facing aspect might have been important to the original symbolism of the compositions. Sham bha la, the Buddhist utopia equated with the Tibetan heaven (bde 'byung), lies in the north, and we know that the north was a sacred direction for both the ancient Indians and Iranians. Their heavens and places of pilgrimage were located in the north.

On the opposite wall of the east chamber of Brag ching gur phug is another curious painting which features an anthropomorphic figure and a horse (fig. 21). The figure may be on horseback but the mount is so faint as to be unrecognizable. To the right of the composition is what looks like a tree or ear of grain. Suolang has suggested that the figure is holding this disproportionally large object in its hand (Suolang: no. 205). A closer examination of the figure, however, reveals that its left arm is hanging down by its side and is not grasping the large object next to it. Its right hand is holding what looks like three sticks with a ball suspended from one of them.[46]



fig. 21

Possibly the three sticks and ball invoke a cosmological theme and are attributes of a hierophant or deity with mastery over the universe. The head of the figure is obscured and may have something like horns or feathers rising above it or a therioanthrophic head. In the pre-Buddhist petroglyphs of the Byang thang, animal-headed or masked figures are found in a variety of sites.[47] We know from the *T'ang Annals* that Tibetan priests wore feathered head-dresses and girdles of tiger skin (Snellgrove and Richardson: 64,65). The figure is mounted side-saddle on a horse and wearing a long gown. Its mount

has become very faint and the interface between the two is obscure. In front of the horse and rider is a smaller horse carrying a box-like object with tapering sides. It is impossible to ascertain if this horse is integral to the composition. Above and to the right of this composition is an animal which is very difficult to positively identify (Suolang: no. 205).


fig. 22

In another composition, a man is prostrating to what looks like an idol under the gaze of a lamaist figure with outstretched arms (fig. 22). The indeterminate idol or sacred object is enclosed in a square niche, which constitutes one of the only explicit paintings of an indoor space in the Tibetan rock art of the Byang thang. The worshipping figure is on its knees, bending over as if prostrating. In the foreground of the composition a bulkier lamaist figure is standing wearing a long robe and a peaked cap similar in shape to those worn by contemporary rNying ma pa and Bon po sngags pa. His or her arms are outstretched in a gesture of exhortation or worship. Local informants are of the impression that it portrays Bon po and not Buddhists.

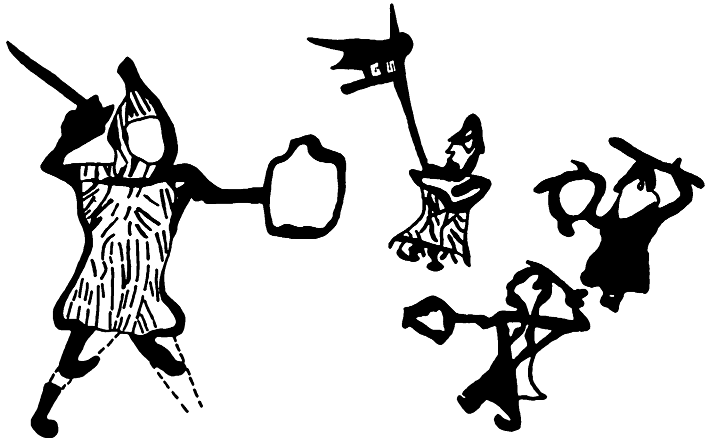

fig. 24

fig. 23

An evocative and potentially historically valuable painting to the left of the figure with the three sticks and ball portrays four or five infantry figures joined in combat. On one side, three or four figures are arrayed, three fairly clearly and a fourth blurred beyond recognition (fig. 23). Two of the distinguishable soldiers brandish swords held overhead in their left hands and carry oval-shaped shields in their right hands. The third figure carries a banner affixed to a pole. The banner is drawn with two different shades of red and a pigmentless area, giving it the appearance of a tricolor. The edge of the banner opposite the pole is curved. These two distinguishing features are important clues for the possible identification of the banner. For instance, in the Imperial period Tibetan military divisions each had their own flags (Snellgrove and Richardson: 31,32). The

three warriors wear what appear to be tight-fitting helmets. The lines drawn on the body of the soldier with the flag as well as the bold triangular shape of his and one of the other warrior's torsos suggests that they are wearing armor. From the *Sui Annals* we know that by the 7th century the Tibetans had chain-mail armor (Beckwith 1984: 106).

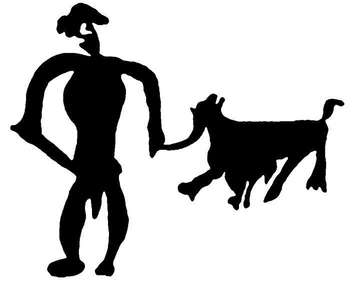


fig. 25

These warriors are fielded against a figure with a very different appearance (fig. 24). This single warrior holds a sword in his right hand and a square shield in his left. He wears what looks like a peaked cap and a thigh-length tunic. Until the Communist period, a peaked cap of similar appearance was worn on the eastern Byang thang, made of white felt. His dress is painted with a stippled pattern reminiscent of armor or fur. Literary references to Tibetans wearing fur and heavy woollens are found in the *Sui Annals* (Beckwith 1984: 106), and undoubtedly such clothing was worn long before this period. Possibly the differences in the uniforms of the respective sides indicate that an indigenous army is standing against a foreign one. To the right of the combatants is what looks like a lama wearing a peaked cap with an object on his back resembling a drum. A line about as long as the figure and apparently attached to his neck is streaming out in the direction of the army. It ends in what may be a bird. The lama appears to be blessing or absolving the combatants, and was almost certainly painted at a later date. The impression conveyed is one of healing and forgiveness.

We now turn to the west chamber of Brag ching gur phug which features the Buddhist six syllable mantra in large lettering. Towards the mouth of the chamber, on the west wall, a naked male figure with a bulging chest, narrow waist and a long object in his left hand is leading an animal (fig. 25), most likely a goat (Suolang: 202). The painting of the man with his bushy hat or head of hair and his exposed genitalia underscores its archaic nature.[48] This composition is neither explicitly Bon nor Buddhist. Below, an artfully painted mchod rten decorates the cave wall (fig. 26). The mchod rten, with its tall base, small bum pa, short, wide spire and long streamers, is characteristic of modern illustrated Bon stupas used in tantric initiations.[49] On the opposite or east wall, two larger, more crude mchod rten with little bum pa and truncated spires are drawn.

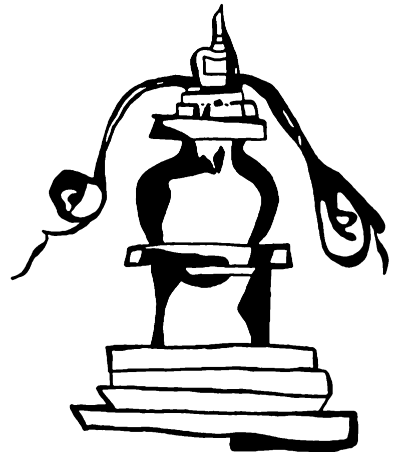
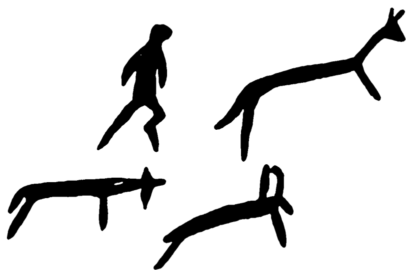


fig. 26

Below these two stupas is a most interesting sequence consisting of an anthropomorphic figure and three elongated animals (fig. 27). Below the animals is another anthropomorphic figure in the

same style as the first. The upper looks as though he is walking or running. The animals in the painting are so extended as to look unreal. A lower figure has bowed legs and upraised arms. This dreamy, surrealistic scene appears to depict supernatural events. It conjures up activities like vision questing, trance, dreaming or some other theophanic experience. The style of this composition is unique at bKra shis do and apparently on the rest of the Byang thang as well.[50]


fig. 27

Above this composition is an intriguing creature with a horizontally and vertically segmented body (Suolang: no. 195). One local sngags pa thought it was a bya tshid, a small crustacean found in gNam mtsho. In the center rear of the chamber is a single figure with very long limbs and a bulbous object on his back. He is holding his left arm to the height of his small head and his right arm to his side. His legs are spread wide apart. The figure possesses a vitality and forcefulness reminiscent of a deity or priest. In addition to the compositions described, there are several other paintings of animals or unrecognizable subject matter located in both chambers. Among these is a bird, two running animals and an eagle or khyung (Suolang: no. 196). On the outer wall of the west chamber is a large area of pigment which might have contained designs but which is now totally unclear.

In the rear of the west chamber of Brag ching gur phug are the only Chinese style paintings found at gNam mtsho.[51] It is not known whether the painters were pilgrims to the region, part of an invading army or traders. The only house explicitly painted at gNam mtsho is found among these Chinese-style compositions (fig. 28). The house either is on stilts or has an ambiguously drawn ground floor. From its window a human figure emerges wearing a cap with a small brim or a flap tied behind its head; the ends of the ties are clearly visible. The roof of the house with its flanged peak essentially recalls Chinese temple architecture. Standing next to the house, a figure is donning a full turban like the variety worn today by the Ch'iang. Below the house is the single largest paintings at bKra shis do—the life-size profile of a torso drawn in outline form (Suolang: no. 201). The top of its robe ends in a distinctive high-necked collar and it wears a visor.


fig. 28

To the side of this large profile are three much smaller Chinese figures (Suolang: no. 201). They are wearing similar hats to the figure in the window but of varying heights, with ties at the back and possibly flaps like those worn in northern China and Mongolia. One standing figure is wielding a sword menacingly overhead. Below him another standing figure

is holding a solar disc in his right hand and a lunar disc in his left hand, possibly indicative of Taoism. The solar disc is shown with what looks to be 11 rays. P'an ku, the Chinese mythological creator of the universe or ancestor of heaven and earth, is sometimes depicted with a sun in one hand and a moon in the other (Werner: 76). In a Taoist myth, the various parts of his body become the sun, moon, stars, planets, mountains, rain, animals, people and everything else (Werner: 77).

The most skilfully drawn member of the group is depicted on horseback (fig. 29). He is holding the reins in his right hand and an unidentified object in his left hand. His relatively high hat and position on horseback speak of his higher personal status. Next to him, in consonance with Chinese tradition, is what appears to be the signature of the artist (fig. 29). A little further from the horseman, the Chinese character for heaven (T'ien) has been written, and most probably alludes to the gnam or gNam mtsho. T'ien, the abode of spirits, became personified and was worshipped by emperor and commoner alike (Werner: 95,96). It is hard to imagine that parallels between their T'ien and the Tibetan gnam escaped the Chinese or their chroniclers who visited and painted at bKra shis do.

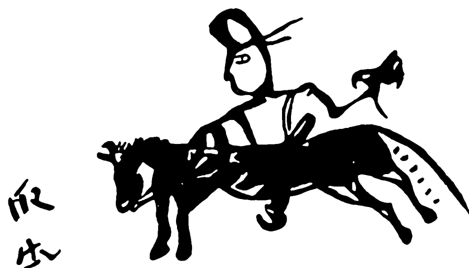


fig. 29

In close proximity to the Chinese compositions are over 50 crudely drawn symbols including some circles, scattered in a chaotic manner (Suolang: no. 200). Of these, eight are legible Chinese ideograms, but only three are masterfully written. It is apparent from the gross lack of refinement that the Chinese characters were written by a marginally literate person (or a person under great duress), which makes their decryption difficult. They were scrawled sloppily in haphazard rows and are often incomplete or incorrectly written. Furthermore, the top left-hand section of the main group of characters looks like a practice exercise.

The legible ideograms include: 1) dai; 2) fu; 3) hua; 4) tai; 5) kang; 7) san; 8) chu; and 9) chi'en. Of these, only dai, fu and kang are well written. In classical Chinese, dai-fu means lord, but in modern Chinese it refers to a doctor. Kang translates as health or well-being. Hua alone means flower, but when combined with another character it can have an entirely different meaning. San is three, chi-en is one thousand, and tai is to combine or unite, but its meaning varies according to context. Chu can be a noun, a verb or an adjective depending on context, and can mean lord, master, divine or supreme power, the principal thing, principal matter, main cause or doctrine, as well as to officiate or initiate. The intended meaning of these characters cannot be unequivocally established. The age of the writing is also in question. Nonetheless, there is little reason to believe that it is more than several centuries old, by virtue of the modern ideograms it contains.

Below the Chinese figures a crude rectangular box has been drawn around three

coarse vertical rows of symbols; several more lie outside of it. Superficially, these unruly symbols look like Chinese characters, but none has the required amount of strokes to invest it with meaning. Why would someone draw unintelligible symbols? Perhaps they were drawn by a local group who were illiterate but decided to imitate Chinese ideograms. The symbols fit into no known cultural pattern and may merely represent the ravings or fancy of a single individual or group. There is one more composition in Brag ching gur phug with a Chinese influence (fig. 30). It consists of a single figure with its arms held up in the air and one leg flexed outward as if it is dancing. It is wearing a wide-brimmed hat which is pointed on top and resembles those worn by Chinese farmers. Surrounding the dancer is a group of unintelligible symbols comparable to the other ones we have encountered.



fig. 30

The Outbound Sites

Leaving Brag ching gur phug and proceeding further on the skor lam, one encounters a very rare natural resource of gNam mtsho—a belt of scrub willow (Salix) sheltered in the most northern aspect of the bKra shis do chen range. It extends for a couple of kilometers, with individual trees attaining a maximum height of two meters. This relict forest is the last vestige of the more extensive steppe forest cover of the Holocene. In the Communist period both scrub willow (glang ma) and juniper (shug pa) have faced unsustainable rates of extraction which has led to a serious decline in this resource. Unless conservation measures are instituted, what is left of the trees at bKra shis do may completely disappear.

After passing the woods, one comes to a small niche in the escarpment with several faint anthropomorphic designs inside and then an even smaller niche with several animal figures. Proceeding on, the escarpment gives way to gentler earth-covered slopes. One now comes to a couple of pits, located above the skor lam, which contain blood-red rocks and soil. These pits have been gradually excavated over many centuries by pilgrims eager to obtain a little of their contents. The pits contain the mineral iron oxide (rDo rje phag mo rakta, the blood of Vajravarahi), a sanctified substance (byin brlabs) prized for its spiritual value. It is alternatively called rDo rje rnal 'byor ma rakta (the blood of Vajrayogini)(sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). Perhaps as cave painting developed, the red ochre from this mine was used as a ritual face paint. According to the *Tang Annals,* Tibetans painted their faces red until King Srong btsan sgam po prohibited it because his wife, Princess Weng chen, disapproved of this custom (Snellgrove and Richardson: 64). Iron oxide or red ochre is also valued as a medicine in Tibet and is topically administered to cure headaches and inflammation of the bones (cf. Das: 1003)

As the largest and purest source of iron oxide at bKra shis do, the two pits are undoubtedly the main source of red ochre for the majority of rock paintings. The deep red color came to symbolize the blood of rDo rje phag mo, one of the most important goddesses resident at gNam mtsho. The desire to experience the gnas chen holistically naturally led to the ingestion of certain substances. As at innumerable other sacred sites in Tibet, the skor lam of bKra shis do is a multi-sensory experience, which engages the pilgrim multilaterally. The depth of experience created in this way enhances the pilgrim's journey and raises it to the realm of the extraordinary.[52]

Below the rDo rje phag mo rakta, on the highest point of the two skor lam of bKra shis do, is the headland's sky burial site (dur khrod). This site has been used for many generations, according to the local 'brog pa, and may be an ancient site which predates the introduction of Buddhism. Although tombs have come to light on the Byang thang, their number does not appear to be sufficiently great to account for the entire prehistoric population. In addition, the celestial burial scene in the sGrol ma phug indicates that birds have been associated with funerary customs for an extremely long period of time. Moreover, the physical environment of the Byang thang makes sky burial the most feasible option. For these three reasons, it is very likely that sky burial is a custom that originated in prehistory, and was not something imported from abroad.[53] The placement of the bKra shis do dur khrod at the highest and most open point of the skor lam is significant. The vultures or cemetery birds (dur bya) which dispose of the corpses prefer high, unbounded ground. Presumably, this site once had symbolic value as well. As the highest and most open place on the skor lam it is the most sky-oriented and, as we know, the sky was linked to the heaven. Hypothetically, the site not only facilitated the arrival of the dur bya, but was also a ritual staging area for the passage of the deceased into the celestial sphere.

In the vicinity tiny spherical black pellets called ril nag are found, which are eagerly collected by pilgrims as byin brlabs. They are reputed by local people to be highly efficacious in curing diseases of the bad kan class. They are also sometimes specifically associated with the rGyal ba Karma pa lineage (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). Another sanctified substance found on the bKra shis do chen skor lam are shiny white and black pills which are considered to be the relics (ring brsel) of the Karma pa lamas (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). For pilgrims, these precious substances are evidence of the sanctity and marvels of bKra shis do.

At the very eastern end of bKra shis do chen, just before rounding the circuit to the south side of the range, is another 'brog pa spring camp called Brag dkar (White Cliff). Here, in a fissure in the escarpment, is g.yung drung sun and moon and a sunburst design. In another fissure are four yaks, sun and moon symbols and indistinguishable motifs. The g.yung drung (Zhang zhung—drung mu, Sanskrit—swastika) is a common pre-Buddhist symbol in Byang thang rock art.[54] The g.yung drung is synonymous with assimilated Bon as well as its more ancient role.[55]

About 500 meters past the swastikas of Brag dkar is a small cave with sTag lung

pa'i phug (sTag lung pa's cave) written on its entrance. A little further on is a place in the escarpment called Cong zhi brag, where a glittering white calcareous mineral is found. This mineral, which gives its name to the site, is used as a medicine to aid digestion and to relieve various stomach complaints. Further on, under an overhang in the escarpment, a sun and moon have been painted, along with a spiral design with dots in the center. The significance of this hurriedly drawn design is not known. Nearby is a small cave with no art, used by the 'brog pa for hay storage. Continuing along the circuit, the next sacred feature is Thang lha'i rgyal sgo (the Superior Door of gNyan chen thang lha), a triangular portal in a spur of the escarpment, through which the mountain god is supposed to have passed. Adjacent to this natural doorway is a cave with a few indiscernible paintings and nearby a tunnel-like cave called rGyal sgo sna lung phug. Inside it two ungulates and Buddhist mantras are painted. From Thang lha'i rgyal sgo back to the Har kab plain, the pinnacles on the escarpment are said to represent the Zhi khro dam pa rigs brgya (the Hundred Kinds of Pacific and Wrathful Deities), the deities of the intermediate state between death and rebirth.

The next sacred site is a pair of caves close together, called Sangs rgyas yar byon sgrub phug. The east cave has the names of four sTag lung pa lamas written in red ochre by at least three calligraphers, which suggests that they were written by the lamas themselves. The four are: rJe kun dga' bkra shis mkhyen no (1536-1605); Ngag dbang rnams rgyal mkhyen no (1574-1621); Chos rgyal mo gus grub mkhyen no; and Ngag dbang bkris dang la sgrub mkhyen no. The names of these lamas shows that the sTag lung pa sect maintained a presence at bKra shis do for centuries.[56] It also establishes that the use of red ochre as a pigment continued at least until the 17th century. In the east cave, in dbu med script, is a passage which announces the presence of the zhabs rjes. In the west cave, the name of the cave is written. The zhabs rjes is located in the west cave and, according to tradition, was made by Sangs rgyas yar byon.

The Sangs rgyas yar byon phug is also associated with Ma sangs dwa'u ngo ngan, as a powerful young man who was initiated by Sangs rgyas yar byon (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). At the time of the initiation an earthen throne was built for the occasion, the traces of which can still be seen (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). Ma sangs dwa'u ngo ngan undoubtedly was related to Bra gu ngom ngan, the A pa hor ancestral hero who supposedly became an acolyte of Sangs rgyas yar byon. He may have been the ruler of the region. Continuing, the next gnas chen is Gu ru phyag rnga'i rjes (the Print of Gu ru rin po che's Hand Drum), a perfectly symmetrical portal, one and a half meters in diameter, in a spur of the escarpment. Above it is an unnamed cave.

kLu khang

Further on, there is a cave suspended in the escarpment. This probably is Shel brag nor bu (the Crystal Cliff Jewel), the cave of sTag lung Ngag dbang grags pa (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). It contains a self-formed nor bu dga' 'khyil[57] and Hum', and a self-formed

image of the Buddha and his two chief disciples. Nearby is the zhabs rjes of Maitreya (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). The next gnas chen is the kLu khang, the largest cave at bKra shis do. It is approximately 20 meters long, 10 meters wide and as much as five meters tall. On the east wall, near the cave floor, a most interesting scene has been painted, combining three pictorial elements. The clearest of these depicts a man on horseback, facing backwards, and taking aim with what looks like a cross bow (fig. 31). He is wearing a bulbous hat or helmet. His target is a hovering figure. This hovering figure is painted in an elementary manner but, at least superficially, it resembles the bdud and klu carved in wood blocks used to make paper or dough figures for apotropaic and magical rites. Opposite the horseman are two yaks, one large and one small. The yaks are enveloped in a mass of pigment which in itself is unidentifiable.

The composition speaks of an attack on livestock by a malevolent aerial spirit who is poised to be slain by the mounted man or warrior deity. Even in contemporary 'brog pa culture, there is a pervasive belief that elemental spirits like klu, bdud and btsan are capable of causing disease in animals as well as humans. Decay and an absence of detail make it difficult to interpret these compositions, an inherent problem in a significant percentage of the bKra shis do paintings. On the west wall of the kLu khang is a seven-petalled flower, along with two ungulates and several g.yung drung. The largest and boldest of the g.yung drung is 30 centimeters in height (fig. 32). Adjacent to the kLu khang is a series of five small ancillary caves. If one departs the kLu khang in a clockwise direction, the first of these ancillary caves contains a g.yung drung and khyung. In the second one is a 25-centimeter-long painting of a 'brong, the largest portrait of a bovid at bKra shis do (fig. 33). Its rear quarters appear to have been painted over another animal. In this cave there is also an animal with a long thin body, stick legs, round head, round eyes and prominent, upright ears (fig. 34). It is unique in appearance among the cave paintings of gNam mtsho.

Most of the figures in the third cave are hard to recognize. The most unusual one seems to have the head of a goat and the tail of a scorpion (fig. 35). The study of this 50-centimeter-long composition is hindered by the nearly complete deterioration of the center of its body. Is this creature a precursor of the composite deities which have been popular at least since the establishment of assimilated Bon? Deities which combine


fig. 31


fig. 32


fig. 33

various theriomorphic and anthropomorphic elements are commonly found among the srung ma and yi dam classes. Generally, the origins of such deities lie in tantricism and in Bon. However, with reference to indigenous influences, very little is known about the evolution of their iconography.

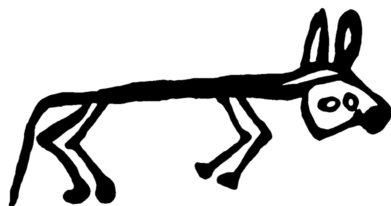


fig. 34

Also in the third cave is a hunting scene showing one or perhaps two people on horseback in pursuit of two animals. The one clear figure is armed with a bow and arrows. Next to the hunt a much larger anthropomorphic figure is standing with its arms at its sides. This figure appears to be watching the activity. Perhaps he or she is a spirit guardian of the hunt. On the opposite wall are obscured figures in black and a horseman painted in red ochre.

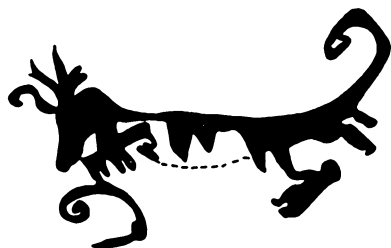


fig. 35

The fourth cave is the largest of the five connected to the kLu khang. It is approximately 12 meters long, but very narrow. In this cave is an assemblage of unique motifs at bKra shis do. These include five anthropomorphs with stick-like appendages, rectangular torsos, large round heads, large round eyes, gaping mouths and bulbous ears. Two of the figures, possibly male and female, stand on either side of a horse with their arms extended outwards (fig. 36). The horse has a bristly tail and mane and what looks like a tall saddle on its back and large stirrups hanging off its side. Another figure is standing alone striking a similar pose. In another composition a comparable figure, 40 centimeters in height, is standing on top of a box-like object. A large unrecognizable object dangles from his right hand. This figure is more crudely drawn than the others and is less clear. The fifth figure is even less clear and all but its boldest features have disappeared. The iconography of the figures does not conform closely to anything found in assimilated Bon or Buddhism.

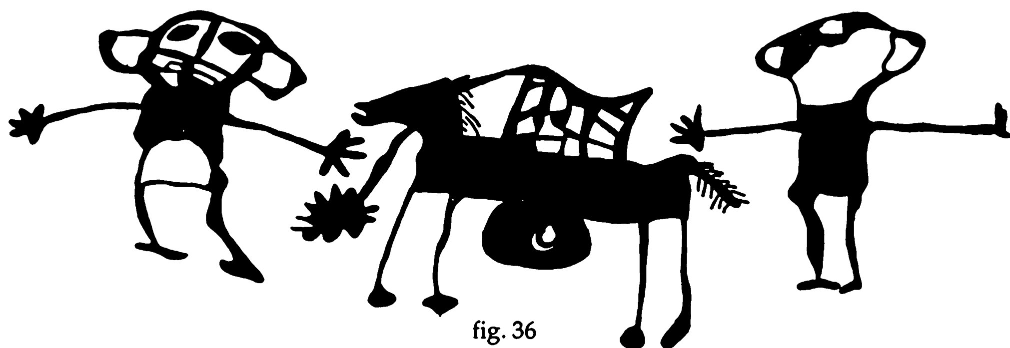


fig. 36

In the cave Kun la bzang yen has been written in dbu can script. This undoubtedly is a reference to the Primordial Buddha Kun tu bzang po. The meaning of yen has not been determined, but it may be an erroneous spelling of the word mkhyen. mKhyen pa is applied to those who are highly learned or revered. This inscription probably dates back to the early rDzogs chen tradition in Tibet. The inscription and the anthropomorphic figures bear a resemblance to paintings found in a cave on the north side of gNam mtsho called sTong shong phug, but with nothing else at gNam mtsho. Also in the cave is the inscription 'Tag lung lama came' which was perhaps written as a sign that this cave has been cleansed of its heterodoxical past. This same inscription is found in several other caves on the south side of bKra shis do chen. These inscriptions bespeak the ritual purification of bKra shis do and the transformation of its religious identity from non-Buddhist to Buddhist.

The most enigmatic compositions in this cave are three sequences of unidentified symbols. The most coherent of these consists of 10 symbols arrayed in three disorderly rows (fig. 37). The largest symbol occupies the far right portion of the first and second rows of the sequence. It is very much fashioned like a roughly drawn dbu can letter 'A' and if it stood alone its identity would seem self-explanatory. This, however, is not the case because to the left of it is a group of highly unusual symbols. In the upper row are three figures somewhat resembling the dbu med letter 'A', but modified beyond all recognized calligraphic conventions. With the exception of the fourth figure in the middle row, which vaguely resembles the dbu med letter nga, the remaining six symbols in the lower rows bear no resemblance to any of the 30 letters of the Tibetan alphabet.

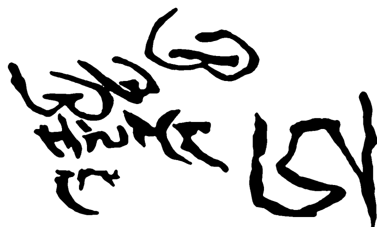


fig. 37

Directly above this sequence of 10 figures is a second sequence consisting of two figures which resembles the symbols in the upper row of the first sequence but are much larger. One of the anthropomorphic figures is standing on a box-like object which encloses the largest sequence of figures; these are badly faded and almost illegible. The uppermost row of this sequence consists of figures congeneric to the ones in the upper row of the first sequence and the two figures of the second sequence. The lower figures appear to be related to the figures in the lower two rows of the first sequence, Four similar figures were engraved on a boulder at Dang ra g.yu mtsho (see Chapter Nine).

While nothing definite at this point can be stated about these compositions, some observations may help set the tone for further inquiry.[58] This series of enigmatic figures seems to represent an ancient system of cipher or notation used by a cult group. This secret symbolism, if indeed it is such, could have had its origins in the lde'u tradition. The lde'u, originally a pre-Buddhist tradition which employed riddles, symbols and secret languages to disseminate information, is well known in Tibetan literature (Norbu 1995: 21,22). The term probably originated in Zhang zhung and has the import of

intelligence or understanding, although its exact meaning is not known (Norbu 1995: 21). According to texts the lde'u was also an instrument of power for the Tibetan kings (Norbu 1995: 22).

It is very unlikely that the symbols in the fourth ancillary cave of the kLu khang could be part of a rudimentary form of writing which predates the modern system of Tibetan writing. More probably they represent the scrawling of a preliterate person or group trying to copy or modify proper Tibetan writing in an attempt to capture the power and status of the literary tradition. But what group living only seven days walk from Lhasa would not at least have had indirect access to writing, books or other aspects of literary culture? If these symbols do indeed postdate the introduction of writing in Tibet, they must have been created as a countervailing cultural force to Buddhist literary culture. In other words, they were written to express a cultural distinctiveness or as a form of protest against the center of intellectual and political power lying to the south. A chronological placement after the introduction of Buddhism suggests the symbols were painted by a Byang thang-based faction which rejected literacy and Buddhism in favor of an indigenous religion and mode of expression.

The figures under review are almost definitely not part of a system of writing developed prior to the advent of Buddhism in Tibet. For one, they are far fewer in number than one would expect in an inscription based on an alphabet and, furthermore, they are positioned in a haphazard and inconsistent manner. More importantly, it is generally believed that there is no prototype of the Tibetan alphabet. Most sources agree that the Tibetan system of writing was introduced in the time of King Srong btsan sgam po, probably in the 630s (cf. Stein: 59; Beckwith 1984: 220). The actual development of the script is attributed to one of the king's ministers, Thon mi sam bho ta, who utilized a medieval Indic script as technical inspiration.

There is however, a contesting school of thought, championed by the Bon po, which maintains that, rather than inventing Tibetan writing, Thon mi sam bho ta improved upon an indigenous system of writing in order to facilitate the translation of Buddhist texts (cf. Norbu 1989: 8; Dagkar: Ms-A). Bon historical records speak of a literary tradition used in Zhang zhung based on a script called sMar yig, which has survived in a special form of calligraphy called sMar tsugs or Lha bab yi ge (Norbu 1989: 8,9; Dagkar: Ms-D). There is another script which, according to the Bon po, originated in pre-Buddhist Zhang zhung, and which is similar to the ornamental Lan tsha script; it is also typified by the inscription on the King Lig mi rgya seal.[59] An examination of the figures in the cave reveals little or no affinity with the scripts believed to have been used in Zhang zhung.[60] Therefore, it must be concluded that they are not directly part of any literary tradition.

The Final Leg of the sKor Lam



fig. 38

Leaving the kLu khang, the next sacred site is Thang lha'i mdzod khang (Treasure House of gNyan chen thang lha), a large cave with various chambers. Little of the lore attached to this cave, aside from its evocative name, seems to have survived. In the next cave, a small unnamed one, a figure on horseback is holding a large upright object (fig. 38). The object is fixed to a pole and appears to have rays radiating out from its top. This object is reminiscent of banners inscribed with mantras used from ancient times to clear the way ritually for kings or high-ranking lamas. Such a banner was carried upright by a mounted man riding at the head of the party which was receiving the dignitary. Details of the horse include its saddle, reins, mane, mouth, an eye and one hoof. The rider is apparently therioanthropic and has an animal-like head.[61] A yak, g.yung drung and unidentified figures have also been painted. In an adjacent cave ungulates in black pigment have been drawn crudely along with an inscription that, in conjunct form, reads, "Grup thob dpal na mo" (Hail to the Great Adept), which is certainly an allusion to one of the Buddhist saints who visited bKra shis do.



fig. 39

Proceeding on, in another larger cave a flaming jewel (nor bu me 'bar) has been painted, and next to it is a swastika (fig. 39). There is also a smaller, more illegible flaming nor bu. In a nearby niche is a painting of a solitary figure. Further along the skor lam is another nameless cave suspended in the escarpment around which a facade has been built; it must have been a hermitage at one time. In a cleft at the base of the escarpment appear simply drawn figures standing and on horseback and, near the ground, linear designs consisting of a central vertical line intersected by several shorter horizontal lines. In front of them grow nettles which are aesthetically harmonious.

Next on the circuit is an approximately 12-meter-long cave containing tsha tsha. Nearby is an isolated rock buttress called rTa phur. In it are two caves, one empty and raw, the other one well furnished and used by meditators. This latter cave is called gZims phug rta phur ma and is the cave of the third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339)(sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). The nearby gnas chen, called rTa phag yab yum, is a natural stone archway. It is envisioned as the deities rTa mgrin and rDo rje phag mo in ecstatic embrace. The archway also contains a self-manifested image called dPal ldan

dmag zor rgyal mo'i gtor zor, a kind of magical weapon used by dPal ldan lha mo. The last holy site on the bKra shis do chen skor lam, adjacent to the Har kab plain, is the self-formed image of the protector Dam can dkar po. It consists of a distinctive patch of white rock on the grays and reds of the escarpment and bears a striking resemblance to the form of a goat. Next to this is an unnamed, shallow cave.

End Notes:

1. An excellent allusion to the elemental and deistic nature of the srin mo is found in the myth about the 27 eggs produced by Chu lcam rgyal mo and Srid pa Sangs po 'bum khri. From the last set of nine eggs (dbal gyi sgo nga), nine different types of goddesses (Byin te dgu) appear, including a srin mo from a copper egg (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 313-315). This srin mo, like seven of her sisters, was beautiful in appearance and a chief goddess of the universe (Karmay 1983: 8).
2. A Byang thang-based srin mo myth is found in the gNam ru province in the area around Bul dkar mtsho (Soda Lake), which is located 80 kilometers northwest of gNam mtsho. Just north of Bul dkar mtsho is rDo ring, a megalithic site documented by George Roerich and his Central Asiatic Expedition in 1927. Subsequent to its documentation, the megalithic site was radically altered by the construction of 100 cairns, each of which is said to represent a bead of Gu ru rin po che's rosary, and is now known by its modern name, mChod rten brgya pa (One Hundred Stupas). According to local legend, a srin mo lived in Bul dkar mtsho and began threatening the 'brog pa with floods and the loss of their homes and livestock. The inhabitants sought the assistance of Gu ru rin po che, who agreed to help them. With his magical powers he located the heart of the demoness and, striking his mala on the ground above her heart, made her immobile. Thus subdued, the srin mo caused no more problems and the brog 'pa were saved. An account of the legend of the srin mo of Bul dkar mtsho was published in *Himal*, cf. Bellezza 1995. A similar tale to that of Gu ru rin po che rescuing the 'brog pa from a flood is told about sKe ring mtsho (Ma 1991: 36). In this myth, Gu ru rin po che manages to save the country after building 113 stupas. Gu ru rin po che also figures in a parallel myth at mTsho sngon po in A mdo province. A minister belonging to the mGar family and his party, fleeing from the wrath of King Khri srong lde btsan, came to mTsho ngon po. They badly needed water, so the minister directed a man to ride into the middle of a plain where he would find a stone lying on the ground. He lifted the stone in an effort to collect water from underneath it for his party. This angered the goddess of the plain, Khri shor rgyal mo, who began to let water pour out of her heart. The plain flooded, killing many 'brog pa in the region. This is how the goddess is supposed to have received her name which means 'Queen of the Throne of Loss'. The lake grew until it reached its present dimensions in the time of Gu ru rin po che. In order to stem the flood, Gu ru rin po che went to India to fetch a mountain which was the abode of dBang phyug chen po (Mahesvara). He hurled the mountain from India and it landed squarely on the heart of the goddess, pinning

her down in the same way that the heart of the supine ogress was pinned down by the Jo khang temple. The mountain in its present location is known as dBang phyug snying ri and, like Srin mo do, has attracted Buddhist practitioners for centuries. The myths attached to Bul dkar mtsho and mTsho sngon po are indicative of the wild and angry nature ascribed to pre-Buddhist lake goddesses. The myth of Khri shor rgyal mo furnished here was obtained by the author in personal communication. It is one of several Tibetan myths explaining how mTsho sngon po came into being.

3. This transmogrification of the srin mo from the divine to the demonic is also evident in the myth of the supine goddess. This goddess, in function, is reminiscent of the Buryat world supporting tortoise, which represents the personified terrestrial basis for human civilization (Gyatso: 39). The supine demoness also shares a resemblance with Tiamat, the Babylonian goddess of the deep, and the Indian Prajnapat, in that the myths associated with these goddesses have similar structural motifs of partition, demarcation and regulation which conveys the founding of civilization (Gyatso: 40).
4. Evidently these tiny black stupas refer to a kind of fossil. Various kinds of fossils are collected by pilgrims and natives as byin brlabs. Their whimsical shapes, relative rarity and resemblance to holy objects explain why they are considered highly desirable.
5. This biographical account of rGyal ba lo ras pa appeared in the 1991 edition of the *Bod ljongs nang bstan*, a magazine of Tibetan religious culture; see Cog grwa ngag dbang bstan 'dzin, pp. 88-105. For data on the birth and early life of rGyal ba lo ras pa, see pp. 89-91; for an account of his time at gNam mtsho, see pp. 96-100; and for the events accompanying his death, see pp. 103,104. Unfortunately this account's primary sources are largely undocumented. Nevertheless, much of this biography is based on the *'Brug pa bka' brgyud gser phreng*.
6. It is not clear from this account how long the brave fisherman spent at Srin mo do with the saint, but surely it was for a much shorter duration than that spent by rGyal ba lo ras pa.
7. From this account, it is clear that Zhwa do refers to one of the other two islands of gNam mtsho. Of these two islands (gLang do and Chig do), the most likely candidate for Zhwa do is gLang do because, reportedly, it has a cave while Chig do does not.
8. The sTag lung yab sras gsum consists of the founder Ngag dbang bkra shis dpal (the spiritual father), sKyes mchog rin chen mgon po and Chos sku Sangs rgyas yar byon (the two spiritual sons).
9. The origin or ethnic make-up of the Hor army that threatened Sha' kya rin chen is not identified. Most plausibly it was under the command of the Mongol, whose army in the second half of the 13th century frequently intervened in Tibetan affairs. We can infer from the sequence in the biography that the encounter transpired before the death of Sangs rgyas yar byon in 1272. We know, for example, that in 1251-1252 the Mongol chief Hsien-tsung launched a campaign against Tibet, and in 1267 the Mongols suppressed a revolt by the chief of 'Dan ma ri (Kwanten: 77-79,125). Curiously, according to the account, the all-powerful Hor pa were apparently neutralized rather than eliminated. We cannot say what political events surrounded the miraculous display of lama Sha' kya rin chen's power, but are advised

to suspect there were alliances between the sTag lung pa and Hor pa.

10. The case of the people called mtshal pa/tshal pa (text gives both spellings) is, however, a very different story. Tshal pa, also a district in dBus west of Lhasa, was one of the 13 khri skor (districts) of dBus and gTsang which was awarded to Qubilai Khan in 1260 when he took control of Tibet (Kwanten: 146,147). In the above account we see the Tshal pa being killed in droves by the magic of Sha' kya rin chen. In our context, a period of political fragmentation in Tibet, the Tshal pa were a non-Buddhist group probably under the jurisdiction of the Tshal pa district. An important clue to their religious identity is provided by Ma sangs dwa'u ngo ngam who evidently was the local leader or ally of the Tshal pa.
11. The ma sangs in legend were a group of ancient non-Buddhist rulers and ancestral deities of Tibet, and belonged to the the'u rang class of semi-divine beings the most popular being the 'Nine Ma sangs Brothers' (Norbu 1995: 14,15). References to them are scattered in Bon and Buddhist texts. According to a leading sngags pa who is a native of gNam mtsho and is familiar with the *sTag lung chos 'byung*, Ma sangs dwa'u ngo ngam is probably none other than the gNam mtsho A pha hor ancestral hero Bra gu ngom ngan. sTag lung rtse sprul also connects this personality with gNam mtsho (sTag lung rtse sprul: 19). Yet, caution is indicated. It is possible that Ma sangs dwa'u ngo (sic ngon) ngam was the last non-Buddhist ruler in a long line of 'Bra' rulers founded by Bra gu ngon ngam. There is undoubtedly a genealogical connection between the two Ngon ngam cited here. Another clue, albeit not as strong, to the non-Buddhist identity of the Tshal pa is the manner in which they were summarily executed by Sha' kya rin chen as a final solution to the threat they posed to the sTag lung pa. The last account of Ma sangs dwa'u ngo ngam is of him being converted to Buddhism as he lay dying. This event probably alludes to the final demise of significant non-Buddhist political power in the region. A tale of the ma sangs set in the same period as the one recorded in the *sTag lung chos 'byung* is found in the *rGya bod yig tshang*. See Vitali 1996, pp. 570, 571. It records that one night Sa skya dpon chen camped at a place called mTsho mo ru khyung in Ru thog, where he lost his horse. With the help of the lha, 'dre and men he was able to trace his horse to a great camp called Gu lti belonging to the Ma sangs. The Sa skya dpon chen and his men were treated well by the Ma sangs, who returned the horse and made a present of an arrow with eagle feathers attached to it. The Ma sangs leader also prophesied the birth of a leader, realized with the birth of the dPon chen's nephew.
12. dMar nad is a serious affliction caused by the contamination of the hearth by burnt animal flesh.
13. In mNga' ris circa 1000, King Ye shes 'od banned Bon practitioners, although, certain affinities between Bon and Buddhism were allowed to continue. During the second diffusion of Buddhism, individual Bon practitioners and isolated lineages remained in mNga' ris, and there is no evidence of inquisitorial prosecution. See Vitali 1996: 112, 220-231. It appears that a similar situation whereby Bon practitioners were tolerated at gNam mtsho continued until the time of sTag lung pa domination.
14. The leadership role assigned to the term du dpen sha in the context of Mongol political

appointments is found in the *rGya bod yig thang*. It states that Dharma dkon mchog was appointed khri dpon of the Byang khri skor, while his younger brother, Kun dga' rdo rje, became du dpen sha. See Vitali 1996, p. 570.

15. The earliest tier of rock art has posed insurmountable problems of identification for contemporary Tibetans. This was established by showing photographs of rock art found throughout Tibet obtained from this field survey and other sources to over 100 Tibetans, both in and out of Tibet, over a one year period, including herders, scholars and lamas. Even such experts such as sMan ri mKhan po, sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag and sTag lung rTse sprul could only express opinions rather than being able to furnish concrete identification of the oldest rock paintings and petroglyphs. As a rule, non-lamaist anthropomorphic figures and their attributes and activities prove unidentifiable. It can only be concluded that the compositions of this earliest phase are part of an ancient and nearly forgotten cultural heritage. This earliest tradition can loosely be placed in the category of the aboriginal religion, gDod ma'i chos lugs.
16. In 1987, an article appeared in *China's Tibet* claiming that a Bon monastery existed at bKra shis do in the 2nd century. Unfortunately, no documentation was provided.
17. Unless otherwise noted, the source of all the data on the two skor lam of bKra shis do came from the native 'brog pa of the region. Several people were involved in the 1994 and 1995 surveys including those recognized as experts on the sacred geography of the region. Since it is essential to protect their identities and maintain their anonymity, the names of these informants cannot be published.
18. rGwa lo rin po che lived in the 12th century and meditated for seven years at gNam mtsho. He was born into the rGwa caste in the rGwa clan of mDo khams and obtained initiations from the Indian adept A bha'ka'r (Abhayakara)(sTag lung rtse sprul: 24). bDe mchog appeared to rGwa lo rin po che in a vision and instructed him to go to India, where he did penance in the famous cemetery of bSil ba tshal, and obtained a vision of the crow-faced Mahakala (sTag lung rtse sprul: 24). rGwa lo rin po che translated many Buddhist teachings from Sanskrit to Tibetan (sTag lung rtse sprul: 24). According to the *Deb ther sngon po* written by Gos lo tsha ba gzhon nu dpal, he was taught about the Intermediate State by the great Tantric master rNal 'gyor chos gyung (b. 1100)(Roerich 1976: 468). rGwa lo rin po che, one of the greatest scholars of his time, went on to teach Phag mo gru pa (1110-1170), Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110-1193) and Zang rin po che (1123-1193); see Roerich 1976, 469, 475, 555, 556, 714, 760, 789.
19. Tsha tsha are cone-shaped or flat objects, bearing designs are molded from clay with an admixture of sanctified substances; they are placed as offerings at holy places. They are often found in caves and fissures in large groups. They come in different colors and vary in the age and intricacy of their designs.
20. Na ro bon chung, the Bon po adept who supposedly engaged Mi la ras pa in contests of magic, is an apocryphal character as far as the Bon po are concerned. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, no mention of this personality is found in the Bon histories. For

a Buddhist account of Na ro bon chung, see Norbu 1995, pp. 183-185, 187.

21. The bkra shis rtags brgyad (eight auspicious signs) are as follows: 1) gdugs (parasol); 2) rgyal mtshan (victory banner); 3) dung dkar (white conch shell); 4) gser nya kha sprod (two golden fish); 5) bum pa (vase); 6) pa be'u (endless knot); 7) 'khor lo (dharma wheel); and 8) pad ma (lotus). For their description, see Dagyab Rinpoche, pp. 17-41.
22. This reference and the ones that follow refer to the book *Art of Tibetan Rock Paintings*, compiled under the leadership of Suolang Wangdui (bSod nams dbang 'dus), the head of the Administration Commission for Museums and Archaeology Data of the Tibet Autonomous Region (see Bibliography). The "no." refers to the number of the photograph and caption in this book which corresponds to the respective painting.
23. Bya ru bya gri (the horns and sword of the bird) refers to the characteristic finale on Bon stupas. The bird is the khyung. The two horns symbolize wisdom (shes rab) and means (thabs), and the flaming sword signifies that all passions and defilements have been destroyed by this knowledge (Namdak 1995: 159). According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, the symbolic portrayal of the horns of the khyung on the stupa confer sanctity and power, as typified by the unparalleled heights the khyung reaches in flight. In keeping with the symbolism of superlative height, the sword prevents lesser birds from landing on the stupa and sullying it. For such reasons, the mchod rten is a supreme symbol of Bon. The khyung horns are sometimes represented by the horns of a yak placed on top of stupas. The bya ru was Zhang zhung's most renowned symbol of kingly might and legitimacy. Eighteen famous kings of Zhang zhung are listed in the *mTsho ma pham los rgyus* each with the title Bya ru can (Holder of the Bird Horns)(Norbu 1981: 20-22). In the *Gangs ti se'i dkar chag*, each possesses a bya ru made of different precious materials. See Norbu and Prats for a list of them, pp. 127, 128. There is also a rare example of the bya ru being used as a Buddhist symbol in sTod after the second diffusion of Buddhism (Vitali 1996: 161-164).
24. The so-called sky burial is more correctly called bya gtor in Tibetan, literally meaning 'strewn by birds'. This refers to the consumption of corpses by birds. When successful, this method of burial leaves no traces.
25. Early Bon burial rituals as recorded in the Tun-huang manuscripts mimicked the ancient ascension to the heavens (Lalou: 2-4).
26. In his account of prehistory, Dunkar Rinpoche (Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las) echoes long-held Buddhist prejudices when he states that, in the pre-Buddhist period, at the time of death demons used to carry the soul away and cause damage to their family and descendants. Deities had to be worshipped to ward off the demons and sacrifices made to the dead to subdue their ghosts. See Dunkar Rinpoche 1991, pp. 3,4. While such a horrific scenario might have existed at certain times and places, it indisputably does not fit the appearance of the petroglyph under consideration.
27. We know that divinity was immanent in all divisions of the world as typified in early references to the nam lha and yog lha, the deities of the sky and underworld respectively. The passage in the sGrol ma phug is evidence for this kind of archaic, seamless, environment-

dominated religion being retained at gNam mtsho into the historical period. Moreover, the existence of the sGrol ma phug passage does seem to corroborate the stereotypical view that the 'brog pa are the most conservative of Tibetans in language and customs. The belief in a binary universe and binary forces is reflected in the inscription of King Khri srong lde btsan near the burial mounds of 'Phyongs rgyas. It records the king's regard for old religious practices as well as Buddhism, and states that the king acts in accordance with the religion of the sky and earth (gnam sa'i chos) in conformity with the customs of his ancestors (Richardson 1987: 4). The cosmological significance of the lha and 'dre is absent in modern doctrinal traditions. Their role in modern religion is best typified by the *Lha 'dre bka' thang*. The lha and 'dre are justifiably treated as two entities and rendered as deities and demons by a translator of the *Lha 'dre bka' thang* (except in the case of the deity Lha 'dre dkar po), and it is noted that they belong to the lha 'dre mi gsum (Blondeau: 29,49). In keeping with our analysis it would appear that the lha 'dre mi gsum is an indigenous system of classifying all living beings of the universe into a tripartite system corresponding with the srid gsum, which has survived in name only, consisting of human beings and the noumenal lha and 'dre. In the *Lha 'dre bka' thang* rediscovered by O rgyan gling pa in 1347, the legions of the lha and 'dre are described as very powerful and terrible as well as brave and agile (Blondeau: 29,71,72). The lha 'dre are also from an evil race and special temples must be built to resist them (Blondeau: 114). The text chronicles the affinity of the lha and 'dre with the klu and gnyan when they meet at g.Yas ru in gTsang (Blondeau: 96). In one encounter with Gu ru rin po che, the lha and 'dre cause the world to tremble and fog, rain, lightning, hail, a red wind, animal and human epidemics and other strange occurrences to transpire (Blondeau: 98). Clearly, the *Lha 'dre bka' thang* demonizes the lha 'dre and their elemental power and associates. Such measures were necessary for Buddhism to triumph over the indigenous religion. Yet Buddhism is not alone here, for in assimilated Bon tradition the 'dre are considered ghosts and demons.

28. An excellent source of obtaining information on the paintings of bKra shis do was the Tibetan people themselves. Those with a good sense of history were able to supply valuable insights on lamaist themes although, as a rule, they were nonplussed by the more primitive themes. A survey of around 100 people from all walks of life, young and old, demonstrated that the character of Tibetan religion since the introduction of Buddhism and Indian thought has changed so significantly as to render much of the religious and cultural symbolism from the preceding period virtually incomprehensible to most Tibetans. Despite the existence of a formidable body of popular and aboriginal traditions, most informants knew nothing about the historical significance of petroglyphs and rock paintings with non-lamaist motifs.
29. The conclusion that the petroglyphs and paintings of sites like bKra shis do on the Byang thang were largely created by the ancestors of the present-day inhabitants has also been arrived at by other researchers. See Li and Huo, p. 35.
30. The photographs contained in *Art of Tibetan Rock Paintings* demonstrate that a high percentage of the petroglyphs found on the Byang thang are concerned with hunting.
31. A Tun-huang manuscript which provides valuable insights into the social life of Imperial

era Tibet is one that deals with hunting accidents. This document details penalties for inadvertently striking someone with an arrow during hunting and reflects an elaborate hierarchical social structure. There is also an extensive list of penalties set forth for failing to rescue someone who has fallen among the prey (and conversely rewards for rescues) as well as penalties for stealing arrows and meat. In the Imperial era according to the *Tang Annals*, yak hunts were staged for visiting dignitaries, and yaks were sent to Chinese emperors as presents. See Richardson 1990, pp. 5-27.

32. A comparison of the paintings of bKra shis do with the rock carvings of the Byang thang shows that hunting scenes make up a larger percentage in total in the rock carvings. See *Art of Tibetan Rock Paintings*.
33. For a trilingual introduction to the themes found in Tibetan petroglyphs and rock paintings and their historical content, see Li and Huo, *Art of Tibetan Rock Painting* pp. 3-36.
34. Stylistically, this specimen bears a resemblance to Mongolian petroglyphs dating back as early as the Mesolithic. A systematic comparison of Stone Age petrogylphs throughout Central Asia is necessary to establish the chronological and cultural affinities of this composition. What can be stated with confidence is that it represents a different and older genre of painting. For the discovery of Mesolithic petroglyphs in Mojo in northwestern Mongolia, see Cevendorz.
35. The horse revolutionized transportation for the A pa hor. It is likely this took place around the same period as in other regions of Inner Asia, thus representing one of the earliest uses of the horse in the world. The introduction of the horse was a great boon, although it probably exacerbated the depletion of game. Both of these factors would have reinforced pastoralism as the pivotal economic activity. The faster communication and increased carriage that the horse represented led to a reordering of life on the Byang thang. The horse was probably instrumental in the formation of a larger, more complex society, which eventually spanned the Byang thang and paved the way for the founding of the Zhang zhung civilization. Four main species of equus appear to have been distributed over the forests and plains of the Pleistocene, including the Caballine horse of Europe and Central Asia. The Caballine horse included three different wild races known as the Tarpan horse, the Polish forest wild horse, and the Przewalski's horse of Mongolia. Only the latter race has escaped extinction. There is little written or archaeological evidence for the domestication of the horse in the Middle East until 2000 B.C.E. and the distribution of wild species indicates that horses were first tamed on the steppes of the Ukraine or further east between Turkestan and China. The domestication of the horse was probably carried out by nomadic herdsmen. Early evidence for domestication found in Tripolye culture of the Ukraine dates to 2800 B.C.E. By the Iron Age, new and larger breeds of horses had appeared and the domesticated horse had reached the Iranian plateau and Azerbajan. For information on the domestication of the horse, see Drower. In China, the transition from hunting to an agriculture-based economy and the domestication of animals began around 9000 years ago. Osteological remains of the Przewalski's horse were discovered in Yang shao cultural sites (4800 to 3000 B.C.E.). Most

investigators agree that the domestic horse was probably established during the Luang shan period (3000 to 2300 B.C.E.); however, osteological evidence from this time is rare and it is difficult to tell if the horse was actually domesticated. Firm evidence comes from the Machayao and Chichia cultures in Gansu, indicating that the horse in northwest China was domesticated circa 2000 B.C.E. There is no archaeological evidence for the domestication of the horse in the central plain until the late Shang dynasty (ca. 1300 B.C.E.). For a review of the domestication of the horse in China, see Chow Ben-Shun, pp. 105-107. In India, the domestication of the horse did not become prevalent until the Iron Age (1000 to 400 B.C.E.)(Thomas: 109). Near the Bronze Age and Iron Age burial mounds (Kurgans) of South Siberia remains of horses complete with saddles and bits have been excavated (Gryaznov: 135).

36. Trees and birds are a common theme in Tibetan folk tales. In moralistic tales, trees, plants and birds have life-giving properties. In one story, entitled *Story of the Tree of Life*, a parrot captured by a beggar makes himself saleable to help his captor, out of compassion. After being sold the parrot brings his new owner a seed which confers youth after three years but, out of stupidity, his master does not avail himself of it. In another tale, a little bird brings a seed to a virtuous old man who plants it. It produces a golden squash which the old man uses wisely and compassionately. A covetous neighbor shoots the bird and then pretends to be kind by nursing it back to health. The bird also brings this man a seed which he too plants, eventually producing a gigantic squash. However, when the man opens the squash, an emissary of the underworld in the form of a fierce old man appears and slays him. See Shelton, pp. 159-162; 107-111.
37. The khyung represents a popular thog lcags design. Often made of bronze, they come in a wide range of forms and date from the pre-Buddhist period up to relatively recent times. The cave painting under consideration is similar in profile to an early style of khyung thog lcags.
38. This has been interpreted without explanation as representing fire (Li and Huo: 32).
39. The mKha' 'gro'i bro ra was first described by this author in an article which appeared in *The Tibet Journal*. See Bellezza 1996.
40. The 'brog pa envision gNyan chen thang lha as a sky pillar, a celestial marker used to evaluate the movements of heavenly bodies. For example, the rising and setting of the constellations (rgyu skar) over the mountain are observed in order to ascertain the time and seasons. During his nearly seven years on the Byang thang at the Divine Dyads, sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag observed the herders using natural features as timepieces. The use of the 28 constellations (rgyu skar) in conjunction with the 'brog pa migrations on the Byang thang has been noted (Gergan: 42). In La dwags each pastoral encampment has its own indicator, such as a peak, used to denote the movement of the stars, moon and sun (Gergan: 42). Gangs rin po che (like gNyan chen thang lha) is used as a reference point to calculate the solstices and vernal equinox (Gergan: 42).
41. The six syllable mantra, the most famous in Tibet, reads Om' ma ni pad[illegible] Hum'. It is

directed to the patron saint of Tibet, sPyan ras gzigs, the bodhisattva of compassion.

42. The eight syllable mantra, the most important in the Bon tradition, reads Om' ma tri mu ye sa le 'du. Om' refers to the creative potential locked in the five elements which embraces the five directions and symbolizes the epistemological and cosmological center-point of the universe. Ma symbolizes the divine mother, Chu lcam rgyal mo, the source of existence. Tri, mu, ye, sa, las and 'du represent the seed syllables of the Six Subduing gShen ('Dul ba'i gshen drug) who oversee the six realms of existence ('gro ba rigs drug).
43. The deer in the Buryat culture was long perceived to be connected with the heavenly sphere (Basilov and Zhukovskaya: 162). In the 19th century, the iron head-dresses of the shamans of Buryat were decorated with deer antlers as a sign of the shaman's connection with the upper world (Basilov and Zhukovskaya: 162).
44. Deer are found in the petroglyphs of many of the sites of the Byang thang including: Ru thog county—Lu ring la kha (Suolang: no. 2,5,6,8,10,11), Ngang lung (Suolang: no. 20,25), Ri mo dong (Suolang: no. 30,35,36,37), sDo rgyur mtsho (Suolang no. 46), Kham pa ri phyug gi brag (Suolang: no: 50), gNa' bo lung and mTha' kham pa (Suolang: no. 54,55,59,60,71); dGe rgyas county—Tshwa kha (Suolang: 92); 'Om bu county—Shar tshang (Suolang: no. 110,113,115,116); rGya gling (Suolang: no. 132,133,148). Noteworthy deer compositions include the artfully crafted deer in the Central Asian animal style at Ri mo dong (Suolang: no. 30) and the skilfully engraved stag with a Bon g.yung drung above him and a tear drop shaped symbol above it (Suolang: no. 116). A most intriguing deer petrogylph is found at Lha klu mkhar, which depicts an anthropomorphic figure riding a stag (Suolang: no. 229). At Tshwa kha there is a petroglyph with a congeneric motif (Suolang: no. 101).
45. The use of the turban in Tibet has a long history: King Srong btsan sgam po wore a red turban and the father of gShen rab mi bo che, rGyal bon thod dkar, as his name suggests, wore a white turban (Dagkar: Ms-B).
46. In early Bon, sticks were important ritual objects. The khram shing, a stick or hexagonal-shaped board, is a kind of magical weapon used in rites and as an attribute of the bdud, btsan, ma mo, srin po and gshin rje classes of pre-Buddhist deities (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 274,358). Notched sticks might also have been used as memory aids before the introduction of the system of writing in Tibet (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 358,350). Three other stick-like objects which were attributes of pre-Buddhist deities are dam shing, khram bam and srin po'i khram byang (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 358,359). Other stick-like attributes of pre-Buddhist deities are the spindle, arrow and stick of the srin (srin dbyugs). Likewise, spheres and balls of yarn are also the attributes of pre-Buddhist deities. Lastly, we cannot forget the 'dre dkar's indispensable tool, his stick. Among the Buryat shamans, horse sticks were the chief ceremonial object and were made of iron if the shaman was of very high status (Basilov and Zhukovskaya: 162).
47. Figures of what must be deities or priests with theriomorphic faces or masks are found on a number of petroglyphs of the Byang thang. Some of these distinctive figures also have human heads instead of the heads of animals. They are often drawn with lines radiating from their

heads and bodies which could represent feathers or some kind of ray. Among the obscure 'brog mo goddesses (goddesses of the pastures) are eight queens with human bodies and animal heads (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 303). Parallels in appearance aside, the identity of these pre-Buddhist figures is difficult to establish because they are part of a lost cultural tradition which was assimilated and subsumed to some degree by Bon and Buddhism. They are often drawn as part of animal and hunting scenes, illustrating that they were associated with natural phenomena or human personalities closely associated with the environment-based activities of the ancient Tibetans. Such figures give us one of our best views into the culture and religion of the Tibet of remote antiquity. The relationship of these figures and the paleoreligious traditions they represent is unclear. At Lu ring la kha, two of these figures, one standing and one sitting, are seen raising their hands amidst hunters and a menagerie of wild animals (Suolang: no. 12,13). At mTha' kham pa what look like two wizards, one with a triangular shaped head and one with a beak, stand facing each other with circular objects in their hands (Suolang: no. 62,63). Theriomorphic deities and hierophants also figure in other petroglyphs at the site, as does a figure with a large head-dress (Suolang: no. 66,76). There are two superb examples of this genre at Shar tshang (Suolang: no. 117,119). In one petroglyph a figure armed with a bow and arrow has a head or mask with a pronounced muzzle which resembles that of a wolf or bear. In another rock carving, a figure with feathers or something similar protruding from his head stands over some roundish objects, with one arm outstretched towards them and one arm raised. Above him is a cruciform object resembling a bird or swastika. This composition conveys some kind of archaic ritualism.

48. Figures with exposed male genitalia are also found in the petroglyphs of the Byang thang (Soulang: no. 44,70,78). This may have constituted an ancient symbolic demonstration of power. This type of depiction is also found in Mongolia and southern Siberia.
49. In the Bon tradition the most popular type of mchod rten is the g.yung drung bkod legs mchod rten (the generation of happiness stupa). In the *gZi brjid*, 360 different types of stupas are mentioned but only 120 of them have a physical form. Doctrinally, the structure of the mchod rten is said to represent all the sutra, tantra and rDzogs chen teachings. The lower five steps of the stupa represent the five elements; the square pedestal, the Four Compassions of the Buddha; the upper four steps, the Four Kindnesses; the vase, the nature of the Buddha; and the 13 rungs of the spire, the 13 bhumis or complete knowledge of the Buddha. See Tenzin Namdak 1994, p. 159.
50. In form and expression it is most like a petroglyphic composition found at the Marlai Somon site in Mongolia (Okladnikov 1981a: 190). This rock carving depicts five animals with very similar elongated bodies, pointed ears, tubular tails and straight, unjointed legs. In addition to the animals in the Mongolian petroglyph, the rock carving depicts a complete anthropomorphic figure and two incomplete ones, which are similar in style and placement to the bKra shis do cave painting figures.
51. Chinese sources for gNam mtsho include two 19th century works: *Weitsang t'ung chih*, Chapter Three, and *T'eng-o-li-nao-erh* (Wylie: xxxv,116).
52. Imbibing the qualities of the landscape through all the senses is a very ancient practice.

How then did the pre-Buddhist A pa hor conceive of iron oxide in their mythology? Possibilities include: 1) the substance that nourished the earth and all life on it, the sa yi bcud; 2) the blood of the ancestors whose bodies had returned to the earth or underworld; or 3) the blood of the lake goddess. It is known that the Yar lung kings were both the rulers of the yul yab (living subjects of country) and the dog yab (manifestations of chthonic powers) and, in one variation of the Yang bsang lugs, the kings are descended from the underworld (Haarh: 316,317). Furthermore, the king's primary duty in early Bon was described as "opening the door of the lha, shutting the door of the tombs and leading the living to the to the g.yung drung of life" (Haarh: 316). As we have seen throughout this study, the subterranean world was closely linked with religious concepts in the pre-Buddhist period. For this reason we can assume that the deposits of iron oxide played an important role in the religious beliefs of remote antiquity. It is possible that the use of ochre had the following connotations for the ancient painters: 1) it injected magical life to the compositions; 2) it acted as a form of homage to one's ancestors; and 3) it involved taking the essence of the earth and joining it with the sky element in a ritualized epiphany.

53. Other researchers have also concluded that sky burial is an indigenous and ancient practice in Tibet and not one imported from another country. See, for example, Xiong and Tai.
54. The g.yung drung is one of the single most popular symbols found in the rock art of the Byang thang. In a petroglyph found at the Ri mo dong site, two human figures (one with a circle below the waist probably representing a womb) are depicted next to a g.yung drung and sun (Suolang: no. 28). The g.yung drung and sun symbol are also found together at the Sher tshang and rGya gling sites (Suolang: no. 114,149).
55. The term is defined as everlasting or indestructability and is composed of two separate words—g.yung (unborn) and drung (imperishable/undying). g.Yung drung 'the everlasting' most fundamentally refers to life, the power of life, its origins, and its perpetual continuation. This is the oldest significance of the term in Tibetan culture, illustrated by the Bon formula 'g.yung drung of life', although its use long predates assimilated Bon. It is probably because of its associations with the process of life that it has become a symbol of good luck, prosperity, strength and stability in Tibet. The g.yung drung was assimilated with the Indian swastika, whose symbolic meaning is related. According to sTag lung rtse sprul, the g.yung drung was the primary cosmological symbol in the pre-Buddhist period. A survey of the pre-Buddhist rock art of the Byang thang certainly supports this view. sTag lung rtse sprul adds that the g.yung drung functioned much as the rdo rje rgya gram (double vajra) does in Buddhist cosmology. A common Buddhist cosmogonic myth describes how all phenomena sprang into existence from the void (Thubten and Turnbull: 19-25). In the beginning there was a void which came to be filled up by a quiet gentle wind, gradually growing in power. Eventually the wind became thick and heavy and formed a rdo rje rgya gram. From this double rdo rje came clouds which produced rain then, over innumerable years, the primordial ocean. The stillness of the ocean was interrupted by a gentle, smooth wind which churned the sea, and created a foam which eventually thickened to create the earth. The earth rose up

and perpetual rains led to the creation of many oceans from which the universe was born. In the center of the universe, Ri rab lhun po, the abode of the gods appeared and, after a long chain of other cosmogonic processes, our world and human beings appeared. In this Indian-inspired cosmology, the rdo rje rgya gram is the first object to arise in a long concatenation of events which led to the creation of human beings. Likewise, in the pre-Buddhist period the g.yung drung was also a generative symbol, albeit was associated with an indigenous cosmogony. The swastika is an ancient and widely found symbol in the Americas and Eurasia. It is best represented in Eurasia as a solar symbol (Simpson: 104-111). In the petroglyphs of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Xinjiang, the swastika symbolizes the generative principle of the race as well as cosmic attributes (Kimball and Martynov). Its origins in Tibet are not known, but it might have also been a sun symbol. Now shorn of much of its solar symbolism, it still retains its life-giving connotations. The oldest depicted swastikas (they face both ways) known from South Asia are found on Harrapan pot shards dating from the first half of the fourth millennium B.C.E. (Possehl: pl. 6.12). The first king, gNya' khri btsan po, is said to have manifested a swastika and other supernatural anatomical signs (Norbu 1995: 23). This legend illustrates the importance of the g.yung drung in ancient Tibetan culture.

The use of the epithet g.Yung drung Bon for assimilated Bon is recorded in literature dating to its inception in the 10th century (Karmay 1975: 172). Bon tradition and cave art, however, clearly illustrate that the link between Bon and the g.yung drung is much older than the written record. The doctrinal meanings of g.yung drung in Bon reflect the great assimilation of Buddhist thought which occurred before the end of the 10th century. The earlier significance of g.yung drung was almost overwhelmed by new intellectual and religious traditions. Nevertheless, the new symbolism attached to the g.yung drung was also momentous and formative, and the g.yung drung retained its religious pre-eminence in the assimilated Bon tradition. In Bon mythology, the religion is said to have originated in the land Ol mo lung ring, a land dominated by mount g.Yung drung dgu brtsegs (Mountain of the Pile of Nine Swastikas), which symbolizes the Nine Ways of Bon (Karmay 1975: 172-175). The g.Yung drung also has much Bon doctrinal symbolism. In general, the g.yung drung is symbolic of the means and behaviors which lead to enlightenment; g.yung is the symbol of all virtuous phenomena and drung, pure discrimination. In Bon, philosophical differences exist depending on whether the word is defined from a Sutrayana, Tantryana or rDzogs chen perspective. In rDzogs chen the g.yung is something that is non-divergent from the intrinsic nature of the mind, and thus is identical with its primordial state. Drung, on the other hand, is the unchanged or unobstructed intrinsic nature of the mind, and thus also the pure activities which spring from the primordial mind. In the Supreme Vehicle of rDzogs chen, the essential substance is the thought of enlightenment (g.yung drung sku). Don kyi g.yung drung is the ultimate or essential nature of the mind possessed by all sentient beings, and rtags kyi g.yung drung, the signs or manifestations of the process of apprehending the intrinsic nature of the mind.

In contemporary 'brog pa culture, the g.yung drung is an important symbol in textile

designs, and is featured on sashes, ga'u belts, boot ties, saddle bags (sgye mo) and as an appliqué on the fleece hats worn by women. During the A pa hor marriage ceremony, if a girl is to join her husband's household she will come to his tent or house on horseback accompanied by her relatives and friends. At this time a g.yung drung is drawn at the threshold which the girl will first pass over as a sign of her salutary welcome. A felt mat (phying pa) of white lamb's wool decorated with a brown wool pair of swastikas (g.yung drung lag rbis) is also especially made for the occasion. The pair of swastikas symbolize marital happiness and stability. When the first child is born it is used as his or her sleeping mat and is thought to bring good luck to the child. Particularly in the province of gNam ru, the bride first dismounts onto a felt mat decorated with a blue g.yung drung (Lha bu and bLo bzang: 53). On the 30th day of the last lunar month in the Nag chu prefecture, 'brog pa tents are decorated with designs made from a paste of water and flour. Designs include the g.yung drung as well as the sun and moon, bkra shis rtags brgyad, yak, sheep and human figures. Thus, the role of the g.yung drung in contemporary 'brog pa culture is directly related its function as an apotropaic and fortune-bestowing symbol.

56. A root source for biographical data on the famous personalities of the sTag lung sect is the *sTag lung bka' brgyud gser phreng* published by the Sungrab Nyamo Gyunphel Parkhang (gSung rab mi nyams gang 'phel par khang), Palampur, H.P., India.
57. The dga' 'khyil is a symbol of good auspices often found in the form of a gemstone.
58. The dating of paintings which contain organic compounds would be greatly aided by the proper application of advanced technological tools. Sophisticated new techniques require only a minute sample of the parent material. It is hoped that such an approach will be undertaken.
59. This seal, made of iron with a thin covering of silver, is enshrined in the Tibetan Bon po Monastic Centre in Dolanji, H.P., India. It was kindly made available for examination by rGyal ba sMan ri mkhan po, the head of the Bon religion. The seal reads: "Kha tsan pa shang li shi ra' tsa" (Lig mi rgya, the Conqueror of the World). It is one of the best examples of the pre-Buddhist system of writing according to sMan ri mkhan po. The seal is also examined in Dagkar: Ms-D.
60. An appraisal of the symbols was made by sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag in October 1995 and by sMan ri mkhan po in December 1995. Both of these scholars observed that the figures are not comparable with the sMar script system of writing used in Zhang zhung or with any contemporary Bon symbolism.
61. Zoomorphic religious attributes persisted for a long time in Tibet. For example, the *Lho rong chos 'byung* mentions the Go can gsum, three Karma pa lamas active in sTod in the 13th century, who wore zoomorphic crowns of yak, tiger and leopard which has parallels in a Sassanid kingly custom (Vitali 1996: 428,429).

CHAPTER FIVE

Survey of the Other Sacred Sites of gNam mtsho

Introduction

As important as Srin mo do and bKra shis do are to the history and culture of gNam mtsho, these are but two of the many sacred and significant sites on the lake. There are several other Buddhist monasteries and hermitages, a number of Bon po sites and places of archaeological interest, many caves and various gnas chen which form the geographical basis of the region's historical and cultural heritage. gNam mtsho offers a pageantry of legendary sites at which to reflect upon history and the human experience.

South Side of gNam mtsho

ear La rgan la, the main bridge between southern Tibet and the Byang thang, is a self-formed throne of the epic hero gLing Ge sar. This legendary hero has wide appeal throughout the Tibetan plateau, thus it is easy to understand why he manifests in formations of the region. These indelible imprints of the epic hero are found all over the Byang thang.[1] The streams that flow off the north and south sides of La rgan la are both called La rgan chu and are under the protection of a yul lha with the same name.

Descending from La rgan la towards the lake, one enters a defile called sGo gtsug brag (the Cliffs of the Entrance Peak). Emerging from this rocky corridor, several rugged hills intervene between the road and the plain which forms a wide margin around the south east corner of gNam mtsho. According to local legend, these natural land forms were created when gLing Ge sar killed and dismembered his arch enemy bDud A khyung. Among his body parts the villain's lungs created gLo ba ri (Lung Mountain), his heart Dran pa ri (Memory Mountain) and his spine the long ridge, Brag ra thar (the Freed Goat Rock). The duel between the giants of the epic stemmed from the time bDud A khyung ruled over gNam mtsho. During his reign he indulged in a killing spree and threw the bones of his animal and human victims into the lake. Eventually, the bones reached the bottom of the lake and from there spread into the oceans and contaminated the various orders of klu. The stricken klu inflicted sickness and drought on the earth. The plight of the people was observed by the bodhisattva bird Bya mchu ring (Long Beak Bird). The gods, taking pity on the human race, sent Ge sar to kill bDud A Khyung.

At the base of the La rgan la, on the southeast corner of gNam mtsho, is La rgan do, the single most significant summer pasture at the lake. If one travels in a clockwise direction from here around the southern shore of the lake, bKra shis do is the first major

destination. Beside bKra shis do is a marsh renowned for its large flocks of migratory birds. Among these are bar-headed geese, mallards, Brahminy ducks, brown-headed and black-headed gulls, cormorants, terns, black-necked cranes, pochards and sand grouse (McCue: 167). Beyond bKra shis do, the south shore extends monotonously for scores of miles. A narrow, undulating plain between the lake and the bastions of the gNyan chen thang lha range unfolds endlessly. This side of the lake has far fewer holy sites and 'brog pa camps than the north side. Other than at the southwest corner of the lake, there are no permanent settlements; seasonal encampments are ensconced in the valleys at the foot of the towering gNyan chen thang lha range.

In the spurs of the gNyan chen thang lha range between Nyi ri so dkar gdong and rKyang ri sdo nag gdong is a place called Khra kong khang ma ri, which reportedly has hilltop ruins. These ruins, according to local sources, date to the pre-Buddhist period. Khra kong khang ma ri is one of a dozen or so places in the vicinity of gNam mtsho which are host to ancient architectural remains.

Towards the middle of the south shore is a group of eye-catching cliffs which overlook gNam mtsho called mGar lha mo gdong, the best known landmark on this flank of gNam mtsho. These cliffs contain a cave called O rgyan phug. The khrus sgo or bathing portal of the south is located here and is thus an important ritual site. In the vicinity is a 'brog pa camp at the stream of Chu dkar, which originates from a mountain called 'Phan po sding. Many streams originate from the gNyan chen thang lha range and empty into the south side of gNam mtsho. In the summer, when these watercourses are in spate, torrents are often unfordable.

About 20 kilometers further west, at the base of the gNyan chen thang lha massif, is a group of glacial tarns. The most important of these is Lha mo mtsho dar, who may have been head of a group of nine pre-Buddhist lake goddesses. In the Buddhist tradition, Lha mo mtsho dar was divorced from the other eight lakes which form a group in the rNying ma tradition. She is now associated with Lha mo 'od zer can ma and her retinue (lha tshogs). The other eight lakes represent palaces which house the eight mandalas, deities and retinues of the highest yoga tradition (bKa' brgyud)(*gNam mtsho mtshan deb*: 6). These eight lakes and eight mandalas are: 1) Pho brang g.yu mtsho—bDud rtsi yon tan; 2) Ka la dung mtsho—Yang dag thugs; 3) bLa mtsho pho brang dkyog mo—Phur ba 'phrin las; 4) Chos 'byung zangs mtsho—'Jig rten mchod; 5) Ye shes mgon po bla mtsho—dMod pa drag sngags; 6) 'Dod chung rin chen gter mtsho—Padma gsung; 7) dMar nag rakta 'khyil pa (mtsho?)—Ma mo'i sbod gtong; and 8) sGrol ma lha mtsho—sGrol ma nyer gcig.

Gur chung dgon pa

Near the southwest corner of gNam mtsho is Gur chung padma dgon pa, one of the four monasteries that, according to folk tradition, Gu ru rin po che predicted would be built. Nearby is a tall, purple nine-peaked massif called mChong ri, and behind it a

beautiful range called Pan ri (*gNam mtsho mtshan deb*: 10). Tradition has it that Gu ru rin po che visited the site of Gur chung padma. The date of the founding is unknown, but in its early period up to 500 monks resided here, according to Gur chung rin po che.[2] It is not known if it originally belonged to the rNying ma pa or bKa' brgyud pa, as much of its history has been lost. Tradition holds that in its early days Indian pandits came to teach here. The dgon pa declined over the following centuries, but experienced a renaissance during the time of the seventh Karma pa (1454-1506). In 1642, the monastery was destroyed by the Qosot Mongol, Gushri Khan (Nag chu sa khul: 547).[3]

In 1650, after the Qosot Mongol invaded the region, the dgon pa was partially rebuilt by A kar lama. At that time it apparently devolved to the Sa skya pa sect and never recovered its former glory (Nag chu sa khul: 547). This change to the Sa skya pa sect is supposed to have angered the protectors, which led to its destruction again (Nag chu sa khul: 547), an event most probably connected with the 18th century Dzungar Mongol invasion.[4] Again the dgon pa was rebuilt, this time under the leadership of a rNying ma pa lama named Nyi ma 'od zer. A small nunnery attached to the monastery was also eventually constructed. An assembly hall of eight pillars[5] was reconstructed at Gur chung dgon pa and this small, but regionally important, monastery remained a fixture of local religious life until the Cultural Revolution, when it was razed to the ground. Circa 1988, a new 'du khang (assembly hall), residence for the sprul sku, monks' quarters, and a small kitchen were built. The buildings are rudimentary and represent a small fraction of what existed before the Cultural Revolution.

The most sacred image in the monastery was that of Gu ru rin po che; this was said to be a gter ma which talked. Other assets of the dgon pa included statues of mKhan slob chos gsum (Gu ru rin po che, Shantarakshita, Khri srong lde btsan), Gu ru gtso 'khor gsum and at least 20 other gilt and bronze statues (Nag chu sa khul: 547). Additionally, the monastery possessed silver articles and a precious copy of the *Rin chen gter mdzod* in about 100 volumes (Nag chu sa khul: 547). All of these assets were lost, along with the monastery's small herd of income-producing livestock, during the Cultural Revolution. In 1959, the dgon pa had around 40 monks; it now has about 16 including novitiates. Patronage traditionally came from 'brog pa camps including the 'Du khongs bcu gsum;[6] and the monastery still derives its support from the region's herders on a purely voluntary basis. Important ritual practices of Gur chung included Tshogs li rin chen 'phreng ba, dKon mchog spyi 'dus, Rig chen mja' tshon snying po'i chog ga, Zhi khro kar gling, and Zhi khro des don snying po.

The founder of the rNying ma dgon pa, Nyi ma 'od zer, who was called the 'Crown Ornament of the rNying ma pa Scholars', was a healer and a learned man of high repute. He is best remembered locally for magical pills he made from white stones, some of which still exist, having been carefully guarded by individual 'brog pa families for centuries. The names of the second to fifth Gur chung sprul sku unfortunately have been lost. The sixth Gur chung sprul sku was Padma Theg mchog zil gnon rol pa, born in sTod lung sDings kha in the mid-19th century. He was a tolerant man, an expert in

rituals and practices pertaining to wrathful deities and a Ris med scholar. The seventh and present Gur chung sprul sku is the Reverend bLo gros dpal 'byor bzang po, who was born on May 20th 1927, in the village of Za phug in the Shangs valley. Before his birth, his parents had a series of auspicious dreams, and at his birth a miraculous rainbow appeared in the sky. At five years of age he was recognized as the reincarnation of the Gur chung sprul sku by rMa sprul rin po che and rDza'u rin po che. From 1932 until 1959 the sprul sku lived at the dgon pa. Since then he has relocated to India. Gur chung rin po che revisited his monastery in 1986 and 1994.

gShen gyer

Extending from the west shore of gNam mtsho all the way to the borders of Shen rtsa and rNam gling counties is a region called gShen gyer or gShen sger, which was traditionally part of the gNam ru 'du khongs bcu gsum.[7] In the south it borders 'Dam gzhung and sNye mo counties. In contemporary political geography it is divided between two townships of dPal mgon county, bDe chen and gShen sger. The major mountains of gShen gyer are Jo mo gangs dkar, Dam can lcags do, 'Khor phyug brang dkar, Khong khyim zhal dkar, Gya' btsan zhal dkar and gLo ro rtang khyung zhal dkar (Srid chos and sKal bzang: 148). The three largest rivers that feed into gNam mtsho ('Bo chu, Ngang chu and Dre chu) all have their headwaters in gShen gyer.

In the pre-Buddhist period, the region was an integral part of the Zhang zhung kingdom and was known as gShen gyer. gShen gyer refers to the ancient high Bon priests and their religion. It is composed of two separate Zhang zhung words: gShen, meaning Bon doctrine, practice and practitioners, and gyer, a synonym for the Bon religion (although in Tibetan gyer pa means to chant). The contemporary name of the region, gShen sger (Private Property of gShen), is derived from it being part of the old estate of the Pan chen Lamas. Its inclusion into the estate of the Pan chen Lamas can be traced back to the time of the fifth representative in the lineage, bLob bzang ye shes (1663-1737), whose mother's Bon po clan, Bru tshang, hailed from the region. Until the Communist period, gShen gyer was divided into 15 revenue circles and paid its taxes directly to bKra shis lhun po and not to gNam ru rdzong (Srid chos and sKal bzang: 148). Some of the clans of the region also originated from three families that emigrated north from Tse bo ri gdong in gTsang (Srid chos and sKal bzang: 147).

In the Zhang zhung period, a clan structure developed which has remained intact to some extent despite gShen gyer being exclusively Buddhist for centuries. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, the clans of gShen gyer retain a significant portion of their Zhang zhung histories and genealogies, which is quite unusual in Tibet. The most famous of the ancient gShen gyer clans is Gu rub, which boasts a number of famous Zhang zhung personalities including Gu rub lha byin, Gu rub dpal bzang, Gu rub btsan dor mi sar, and Gu rub btsan po who lived during the reign of King Khri srong lde btsan (Karmay 1972: 42,54,80).

The most famous Gu rub, however, is Gyer sNang bzher lod po, the 7th or 8th century holder of the Zhang zhung snyan brgyud lineage of rDzogs chen which has continued uninterrupted to the present day (cf. Karmay 1972: viii,xxx).[8] His teacher was Ta pi Hri tsa, who was the last in the lineage to receive a rainbow body ('ja' lus)(cf. Karmay 1972: 55; Norbu 1995: 234). The *'Bel gtam lung gi snying po* records that sNang bzher lod po meditated at Sha ba brag in sGo mang northwest of gNam mtsho (pp. 49,50). As revenge for the assassination of the Zhang zhung King Lig mig rgya, Nang bzher lod po is supposed to have practiced sorcery against the king of Tibet at the behest of the slain king's first wife, Khyung za mtsho rgyal (Karmay 1972: 97-99; Norbu 1995: 214-216). In order to save his life King Khri srong lde btsan supposedly agreed to build a gold reliquary for the slain Zhang zhung king, to exempt the Gu rub clan from taxes during visits to Yar lung sog kha (central Tibet), and not to suppress the Bon religion (Karmay 1972: 97-99; Norbu 1995: 214-216).



sNang bzher lod po

In the gNyan chen thang lha range, between the gNyan chen thang lha massif and Jo mo gangs dkar, is the red-tinted mountain Dam can lcags do. In the Yum sras tradition, Dam can lcags do, which is the dwelling place of the deity Hur pa, is also associated with the srung ma Dam can skye bu bzang po, whose rang byung hoof prints are found at several places at gNam mtsho. The mountain, reports sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, is also home to the important rNying ma worldly protector rDo rje legs pa, who was originally a Central Asian deity. rDo rje legs pa is also called dGra lha chen po and rDor legs. According to the *Padma thang yig*, he and his brothers were subdued at 'O yug bge'u tshang (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 154). rDo rje legs pa has a terrifying appearance and often rides a white lion. He is accompanied by the nine Ma sangs brothers (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 156-158). rDo rje legs pa, gNyan chen thang lha, the 12 brtan ma and sTong dpon dgra lha belong to the gTer gyi srung ma sde bzhi (the Four Orders of Treasure Guards)(Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 154,155).

Jo mo gangs dkar, the tallest and most sacred mountain of gShen gyer, is one of gNyan chen thang lha's wives, and has a beautifully symmetrical form. In December 1871 the explorer Kishen Singh reported that Jo mo gangs dkar was a female divinity, similar in shape to Mount Kailas (Kishen Singh: 134). Contemporary hunters make offerings to her of yak butter before the hunt and of some of the quarry afterwards (Ma 1993: 194). The herders also reportedly make offerings here when livestock become sick (Ma 1993: 194). When sLob dpon rnam dag lived in the region, he heard that there were

caves and ancient ruins in the area. sLob dpon bstan 'dzin rnam dag observes that Jo mo gangs dkar is closely associated with the 11th century Bon po rDzogs chen practitioner dGong mdzod ri khrod chen po, who hailed from the nearby Shangs valley. He is credited with meditating in caves and building a hermitage at the mountain. As we learned in the last chapter, rGyal ba lo ras pa spent 13 years in the vicinity. It appears that Jo mo gangs dkar passed from the Bon po to the Buddhists sometime between the 11th and mid 13th century. sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag also reports that the Zhang zhung era sage Shed khug ra khug, practiced at a place near Jo mo gangs dkar called Drang gyi stag tshal.

Until the Cultural Revolution a small monastery, reportedly called Grum this dgon pa, stood in the vicinity of bDe chen. The actual spelling of the initial word is more likely to be 'Drum' after a mountain in gShen gyer called Drum gi stag tshal. This monastery was only a few miles from the west shore of gNam mtsho.

Do skya dgon pa

On a circumambulation of gNam mtsho only the very edge of gShen gyer is traversed. Until recently, pilgrims intent on walking around the lake avoided undertaking the journey in the summer when monsoonal rains made the 'Bo chu, Ngang chu and Dre chu unfordable. This is reportedly no longer necessary because bridges were recently completed. The bridges were built to provide a year-round motorable link between the township headquarters of gShen gyer and the county seat lying over 100 kilometers by road to the north. From Gur chung dgon pa and bDe chen, the next major sacred site on the skor lam is Do skya dgon pa, which is situated on the northwestern shore of gNam mtsho. This is another of the four monasteries Gu ru rin po che predicted would be established on the shores of the holy lake.

Of the four monasteries, Do skya is closest to the edge of the lake near Rags mo do. This rNying ma institution is a branch of sMin grol gling in Lho kha. In early 1872 Kishen Singh and his party visited Do skya twice and used it as a base of operations during their circumambulatory exploration of gNam mtsho (Kishen Singh: 135,136). He gave its name as "Dorkia" or "Dor Lugu Dong" (Sheep-Face Rock) and reported that in addition to a chief lama there were 40 monks attached to the dgon pa. In actual fact, its full name is usually given as Do skya lug gu do (Pale Gray Lamb Headland). The monastery is alternatively called rDo skya; said to be derived from a light-colored stone in the shape of a conch found at the base of the headland (Do skya sprul sku rnam thar: 2). sDo skya is located at a black cliff in the shape of the crow-faced Mahakala (mGon po bya rog), which invests the site with much holiness (sDo skya sprul sku rnam thar: 2).

Do skya was founded in 1641 in the Iron Snake Year by Di rgya rang lcog la rgyal sras bya bral dpal bzang po.[9] Legend has it that Gu ru rin po che and his disciples visited the site, and that zhabs rjes of all 25 rJe 'pangs lamas are found here in stone

(*gNam mtsho mtshan deb*: 10). The site was supposed to have been specially blessed by the Indian disciple of Gu ru rin po che, Dza' na ku ma rwa (*gNam mtsho mtshan deb*: 10). When the founder of Do skya arrived he found the place neglected. By shooting an arrow or bullet at a cliff called Me mda' brag (Gun Cliff) it was stabilized. He is also credited with leaving his zhabs rjes on a rock to protect the dgon pa from flooding. The second Do skya lineage lama was gNgos grub rgya mtsho, who was born in sNye mo zhu; he was also known as Padma 'gyur med. He was recognized and enthroned by a Karma pa and by rGya lcag rgyal po. He constructed a bla brang (his residence) and, above it, a Jo khang of four pillars and three chapels. In the Jo khang he installed a gilt-copper Jo bo statue approximately three cubits tall. He also installed a life-size red sandalwood statue of Maitreya and a life-size statue of the Buddha called Thub dbang grong gyer ma'i. The latter is said to have contained relics of the Buddha. In the time of gNgos grub rgya mtsho, the Jo khang also received relics of Karma pa lamas, many other statues, and two sets of the Prajnaparamita (one written in stone colors, and one in ink). The third lineage lama, who was born in sNye mo Bar thang, was recognized by a Karma pa and died at 18 years of age. Bya do rin po che reports that his name was 'Gyur med klong yang. The fourth Do skya lineage lama was 'Gyur med dpal 'byor dbang phyug, who was born in Bar tha skar tshang. He constructed a ma ni lha khang, a bKa' 'gyur lha khang, and other structures. He also extended the 'du khang to six pillars. He is credited with collecting many scriptures, commissioning murals and with creating many terracotta and gilt images. He died at the age of 60. The fifth lineage lama, Gung pa tshang bstan pa rgyal mtshan, was born in Bar tha. Upon being recognized as the successor to the lineage he was conferred with the name 'Gyur med bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan. He died at only 15 years of age. The sixth cleric of the Do skya lineage was named 'Gyur med shad sgrub chos kyi nyi ma. According to his biography (*sDo skya sprul sku rnam thar*), he was born in 1920 in Hor Bar tha. His father, Tshe dbang dgra 'dul of the sBra chen A rgod tshangs clan, was an important 'brog pa leader and held the rank of sTong dpon. His mother belonged to the 'Dams khang dmar clan. The sixth sDo skya sprul sku was discovered with the assistance of the 15th Karma pa. In 1958 he left his monastery and settled in Bhutan. He was able to revisit sDo skya in the autumn of 1983 and the autumn of 1984. He died in 1990 in Bhutan. According to local oral history, the sixth sDo skya sprul sku as a young man endowed his monastery with a gilt roof and gilt statues of the mKhan slob chos gsum. The seventh sDo skya sprul sku, Ngag dbang chos kyi rgya mtsho, was discovered in Bhutan in 1990.[10]

Before 1959, Do skya dgon pa reportedly had 53 monks. It also had its own herds of livestock for its economic and nutritional needs, all of which were expropriated during the Cultural Revolution. Currently eight monks are receiving instructions from the 73-year-old abbot Lama Chos bdag. Lama Chos bdag is the most highly respected religious practitioner residing at gNam mtsho. Do skya was utterly destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, and it was under his able guidance that it was rebuilt beginning in 1986.

Today its buildings include a 'du khang, ma ni lha khang, senge lha khang, gu ru lha khang, a communal kitchen, gzims chung (lama's residence), and monk quarters. A mchod rten named rNam rgyal as well as a shrine to the Divine Dyad have also been built. Rang byung images include a mchod rten, gNyan chen thang lha's 'brong g.yag hoof prints, and the head print of rDo rje gro lod (*gNam mtsho mtshan deb*: 10). The Rags mo do khrus sgo, the bathing portal of the west side of gNam mtsho, is not far from the monastery.

lCe do

In the headland of lCe do, which is located approximately four kilometers north of Do skya dgon pa, is a cave with a spectacular assortment of paintings.[11] With the possible exception of images in the pyramidal nooks of bKra shis do chen, lCe do contains the oldest paintings to come to light in Tibet. The cave in question is only two meters deep and 1.5 meters tall at its entrance, is protected by an overhang in the limestone escarpment, as is a shallower cave to the east of it. This shallower cave is devoid of paintings presumably because its surface is much rougher in texture. The painted cave faces due east on to gNam mtsho and is about 10 kilometers from Srin mo do. Under the overhang a simple shrine has been built. It consists of a two-meter-long rope with prayer flags, thin strips of cloth, keys, tufts of wool, human hair and protection cords (srung mdud) suspended from it. Although minor, like bKra shis do, lCe do is a sacred site where 'self-formed' paintings can be seen.

More than 250 densely packed monochromic figures and symbols are to be found on the walls of the cave, ranging in size from 2 to 27.5 centimeters in length. In addition to various shades of red ochre, some figures have been painted in a yellow ochre. This color is not represented at bKra shis do. A number of the paintings have been defaced by pilgrims engraving about two dozen mantras into the soft limestone walls of the cave, the majority of them being the six syllable mantra. Also scratched into the cave is a 10-centimeter-tall bust of a lama. The rough edges of some of these inscriptions indicate that they were made rather recently. Two engraved animal figures, one of a yak, appear to be older than the mantras.

Nearly all the compositions of lCe do pertain to hunting, and many more animals than humans are depicted. Non-hunting motifs are limited to a few symbolic scenes of animals and anthropomorphic figures, all of which date from after the first phase of painting at lCe do. Even these non-hunting motifs are indirectly connected with the hunting culture painted all around them. This predominance of hunting scenes contrasts with the more varied selections of bKra shis do and is more in line with the petroglyphs of the central and western Byang thang.

There is not a single painting at lCe do devoted explicitly to pastoralism, nor are domesticated animals represented (with perhaps one exception). Save for the Buddhist additions, this cave is devoted to the physical realities and metaphysics of the ancient

hunting culture. Nowhere else at gNam mtsho is the glorification of the hunt so boldly portrayed. The warrior nature of the early inhabitants of the region is starkly exhibited as they hunt down and kill potentially dangerous animals. However, there are no scenes of human warfare. The much narrower range of themes at lCe do contrasts strongly with bKra shis do, which can be partially explained by the inaccessibility of the former. This preoccupation with one major theme may also be attributed to the limited size of the cave and is an indicator that many of the paintings at lCe do predate those of bKra shis do and reflect a less diversified socioeconomic and cultural phase in A pa hor history.

A review of traditional hunting techniques sheds light on the kinds of activities shown in the rock paintings of lCe do. Hunting of all six species of ungulates found on the Byang thang is still carried out in contemporary Tibet, although the hunting of the blue sheep and antelope is very popular.[12] In order to hunt 'brong, hunters usually dig a pit and construct a blind while men on horseback try to herd the 'brong into the trap (Norbu 1994: 179,180). The hunters try to ensure that the younger animals are lured into the trap because meat from the older animals is tough and not relished (Norbu 1994: 180). The hunting of full-grown 'brong, which is often shown in the paintings, must have had a different purpose. These large animals were mainly hunted for their hides, horns, and other non-edible products.

The full-grown 'brong, which were often made to look even bigger in the paintings (relative to the hunters), also signified bravery and skill on the part of the hunters. It probably also underlined competition between the clans, clan chauvinism and other political calculations. Skill in hunting most probably conferred social status if not political power. lCe do provides scant evidence for a matriarchal society. There are few compositions that speak of female subjects, while the paintings of hunters and hunting exude male dominance. The paintings themselves also elucidate the political domination of men in ancient society. Throughout Eurasia, the Bronze and Iron Age domestication of the horse is generally accepted to have furthered the scope for warfare and to have encouraged men's political dominance. The Byang thang was probably not immune to these widespread socio-political trends.

The prestige of hunting wild yaks has survived in the contemporary folklore of the 'brog pa. 'Brong have a keen sense of smell and excellent hearing, and thus are not easy to hunt (in the days before all-terrain vehicles and high-powered firearms were introduced). However, if we are to believe these paintings, pursuance of 'brong by mounted riders is one method of hunting used in the past. Due to the shape of its horns, the 'brong is usually unable to gore hunters but can easily trample them. (Norbu 1994: 180). Wolves are easier to kill than 'brong and, by displaying its pelt, a hunter is rewarded with money, food and gifts (Norbu 1994: 184).

Again and again one witnesses hunters on horseback charging after huge 'brong with their bows and arrows drawn. Their success is clearly indicated by the number of arrows in the animals' backs. The pictures at lCe do communicate exhilaration,

exuberance, adroitness and adventure. But does this overweening confidence mask certain inadequacies of the time and place? With their recurring theme of pursuit and slaughter of ungulates, these paintings came at the end of a long chapter of A pa hor history that began in the Old Stone Age. The bulk of the compositions, if not all, were made after the introduction of the horse and subsequent to the climatic optimum, and probably coincided with the decline of hunting as the primary way of life. For all their exuberance, the paintings of lCe do, seem to represent the final era of this primary mode of existence.

The absence of lamaist themes in the representational art indicates that most paintings predate the advent of Buddhism and the assimilated Bon religion. Distinct styles of painting are represented reflecting a broad chronological spectrum and perhaps sundry cultural influences. In the rendering of animals these diverse artistic expressions can be loosely grouped into two inclusive phases: 'early' and 'late'. The early phase is not represented at bKra shis do and forms a group distinct from anything else so far found on the Byang thang. It can provisionally be subdivided into paintings composed before and after the domestication of the horse. The main criterion for distinguishing between the two subdivisions of the early phase is the presence or absence of the horse in the paintings.

The early phase depicts the outlines of people and animals with an economy of well-placed lines that bestow a forcefulness, poignancy and vibrancy upon the paintings. This early phase is also characterized by a rich palette ranging in color from mustard to sienna to crimson. These compositions tend to feature disproportionately small heads and an absence of feet, the legs either abruptly end or merge into a point. The figures are all painted with thin, angular, brisk unwavering lines. In one genre, wild yak are painted with lines which sharply protrude from the legs and underside of the animals, exaggeratedly portraying the hairy fringe of the beast. The tails of these wild yaks are painted with the same kind of barbed lines.

The second or later phase of paintings at lCe do is stylistically more varied than the early phase. It can be defined negatively because it includes virtually everything that does not fit into phase one. Therefore, rather than being a distinct type of art, it embraces a variety of typologies. Paintings, like those at bKra shis do, are often colored in to produce a clear silhouette of the figures. The artistic depiction of animals ranges from those of sophisticated detail and form to crudely drawn figures. Typological similarities with the paintings at bKra shis do abound, so that we can surmise that many of them were painted contemporaneously.

There are two compelling distinguishing features separating the two major phases of painting. Firstly, the differences of style are unmistakable. The early phase of painting corresponds stylistically and generically with Neolithic and Bronze age cave paintings of Eurasia in a general or schematic fashion; the late phase, which is variously more sophisticated or stilted, does not possess these cross-cultural links, indicating that it is a more localized genre. The second and incontrovertible reason for distinguishing between

the two phases is that the compositions of the early phase are frequently painted over by those belonging to the late phase. Although two main styles are unquestionably represented, it cannot be negated that they might chronologically overlap each other. Owing to the great variations in late-phase paintings, and the possibility that certain genres were retained indefinitely, it cannot be categorically proven that every painting of the early phase predates the late phase. While the two phases are pre-Buddhist in form and content, there is a third, poorly represented Buddhist phase of painting which is characterized by inscriptions in the dbu can script.

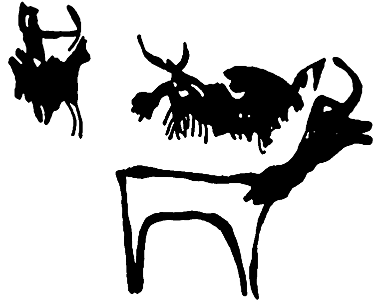


fig. 1

To orient the reader to the relative locations of the paintings, they will be divided into six areas as follows: 1) right outer wall, 2) left outer wall, 3) right inner wall, 4) left inner wall, 5) rear wall, and 6) inner niche.[13] The paintings of the outer walls belong to the later phase of rock art at lCe do. Evidently, the inner walls had already been largely covered before successive generations of painters moved to the less sheltered outer walls. The dating of the paintings at lCe do by a comparative and analytical study alone is not possible. Only the clearest and most distinctive paintings will be reviewed here, omitting the incomplete and obscured figures.

On the outermost part of the right outer wall of the cave, a khyung-like bird has been painted as if it is taking in the view of the cave from the heights. Below it is an obscured figure, and to the left of this figure a lone wolf with a solidly-colored body. Further to the left, a five-centimeter-tall hunter with a bow and arrow is stalking a seven-centimeter-long stag or antelope from the rear. Above this animal stands a solidly-colored 'brong with a massively built body, 17.5 centimeters in length. Below the hunter and stag or antelope, a hunter on horseback is approaching a 'brong with a ground-length fringe of hair from the rear (fig. 1). Immediately below this wild yak is what appears to be a stag with a solidly-colored head and neck and its body outlined (fig. 1). Its legs abruptly end and no attempt to depict hoofs was made. This figure may represent a transitional stage between the earlier and later phases of paintings. Fifteen centimeters to the left of the stag, a hunter on horseback is preparing to let an arrow fly and, although it looks as if it is related to the stag, the quality of the pigment and the style of the art indicate that it is not.

Below the archer is a curious figure combining human and bird characteristics and painted in thin, unsteady lines (fig. 2). This composition seems to portray an indigenous deity. Below it is a proficiently drawn duck. To the right of the duck, a khyung or raptor is hovering; to the right of the khyung, a 22.5-centimeter-long 'brong with a hefty

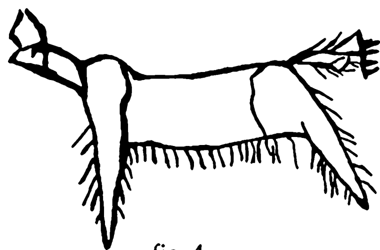


fig. 2

body and horns stands proudly on its own. To the left of the duck and above and below it are a number of portrayals including a horseman with a bow and arrow and a stick figure which is armed in a similar way. Also to the left of the painting of the duck is a rkyang with disproportionately long ears (fig.3), as with the long fringes on some of the wild yaks, the painters saw fit to take a distinctive feature of the wild ass and emphasize it. The lower part of the rear outer wall contains far fewer figures and has been marred by later engravings.


fig. 3

Moving further into the cave, along its right inner wall we come to the first paintings which belonged to the early phase. These include several massively-built 'brong with long bristly hair which hangs off their legs and underside. The angular bodies are taut with pent-up energy and vitality. Perhaps their head and horns were painted disproportionately small to magically minimize the dangers they posed to the hunters. Amidst these 'brong is a horse drawn with the same vibrancy and clean, sweeping lines. It is mounted by a rider brandishing a bow, whose body is depicted by only two lines diverging from his pinpoint head. He appears to be sweeping in for the final kill of the 'brong to the left of him which has been impaled by an arrow or spear. The syllable 'no' and an unfinished letter were added in close proximity much later. Below his horse is a solidly-colored 'brong painted in a blackish red. Above the dark-colored 'brong is a series of parallel crescent designs.


fig. 4

Below and to the left of the black 'brong are hunters on horseback. One of the horsemen with a bow and arrow is approaching a 'brong from behind while another man on foot lassos its horns (Suolang: no. 169). Below this active scene another rider is chasing a 'brong (Suolang: no. 169). Further to the left, just above the inner niche of the cave, are two more 'brong in similar geometric style to the early phase. One of the animals is standing alone, with its tail and head held erect as if alarmed (fig. 4). Its neighbor has been hit by an arrow probably shot from the rider behind him (Suolang: no. 168). The top of the 'brong is painted in red ochre but its bottom half is painted in a grayish purple pigment. To the right of the two-tone 'brong is an unfinished 'brong painted in the same unusual grayish purple.

Situated above the two 'brong is a small painting of an antelope whose body has been decorated with a pattern of fine diagonal lines (Suolang: no. 168); it is the only figure drawn in this decorative style at lCe do. Occupying a space above it is a lone hunter on foot who is stalking a stag with a bow and arrow (fig. 5). The stag is painted with long horns and exaggeratedly thin hind quarters. This composition may also be representative of the transitional stage between the paintings of the early and later phases. Its head and the curves of its belly more closely resemble the later style, while its lack of

feet and a body devoid of pigment are features of the early phase. At the rear of the stag the letters 'O' and 'na' have been inscribed in red ochre as if an aborted attempt to paint the six syllable mantra was made. The vowel sign of the O is partially painted over the rear legs of the stag. Like most of the other lettering painted at lCe do it was never completed. Above the stag is a single ungulate painted in the characteristic style of the early phase (fig. 5). Its tail consists of one fine line and its body is divided by several lines. Above the stag, a creature that looks like a cross between a bird and a man is crudely drawn.



fig. 5

Between the stag and the hunter on horseback with the bow and arrow are three enigmatic symbols (fig. 6). The tail of the hunter's horse is superimposed on the edge of the symbol to the far right, clear evidence that they predate at least some of the paintings in the late phase. However, the unfinished 'brong mentioned above painted in a grayish purple pigment is partially obscured by this same symbol, which is excellent confirmation that they date to a period after the early phase of painting. These three figures uncannily resemble pre-Han dynastic ideograms, but in actuality belong neither to the Chinese literary tradition nor to any other known paleographic tradition.



fig. 6

These three figures are comprised of between six and 12 strokes each and appear to be invested with symbolic meaning. They do not represent a literal portrayal of any known aspect of Byang thang cultural life. This conclusion was reached because the symbols do not resemble any implement, organism, article or natural feature of the 'brog pa world, but seem to be abstract designs or symbols.

The function of the three figures cannot be determined due to a lack of cultural standards of assessment. However, it is worth reviewing possible clues to the identity of the symbols. The preponderance of hunting motifs at lCe do does suggest that the figures are related to hunting culture. Perhaps they are a kind of magical notation, signature or imprint of a facet of hunting culture. While it is most plausible that they are preliterate abstractions which delineate phenomena, processes or objects, it is possible that they are part of a primitive system of writing based on lexigraphs. They could represent a less developed contemporaneous counterpart to the pre-classical Chinese system of writing. As so little is known about pre-Buddhist Tibet, there are few absolutes to guide us. The symbols under discussion had a currency of usage perhaps limited to

gNam mtsho alone.

Returning to the stag and hunter as a landmark and looking to the left of them, one finds a yak from the late phase of painting which forms the largest single figure at lCe do (fig. 7). This 27.5-centimeter-long yak stands alone, unmolested by hunters. This is the only bovid at lCe do which by virtue of its sleeker body and less pronounced hunches may be representative of the domesticated variety of the animal. This figure may have been painted for the following reasons: 1) as a tribute to this economically important animal; 2) to depict a tshe thar or other specially protected animal; or 3) to depict an emanation of the Divine Dyad or some other deity.

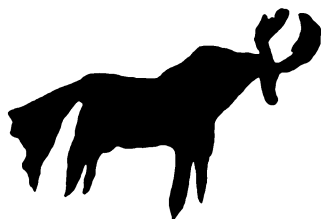


fig. 7

Above the large yak are two men on horseback facing in opposite directions, one painted in red and one in a yellowish brown (fig. 8). These compositions belong to the early phase. The riders are equipped with bows and arrows, one with a clearly visible quiver. Adjacent to them are a sun and crescent moon with a swastika in between them (fig. 8). These three symbols are painted with the thinner, crisper lines of early phase compositions. The sun and moon (nyi zla), are among Tibet's seminal representations which, like the swastika, span both the pre-Buddhist and Buddhist periods.[14]

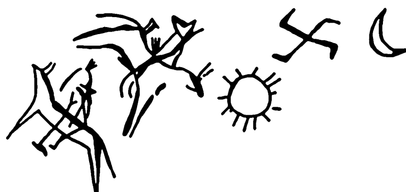


fig. 8

Below the 27.5-centimeter-long 'brong, and to the left of the inner niche, are about one dozen 'brong and deer and a half-dozen hunters on horseback, painted in the style of the early phase in red and mustard pigments. Many of the animals have been injured by projectiles. In the early phase there was a preoccupation with showing animals in various stages of being hunted. In these compositions the might and vitality of the animals is juxtaposed against the mastery of the hunters. Among these motifs is an adroitly painted 'brong depicted in the silhouetted style of the late phase. Centrally located amidst these compositions on the left of the inner niche is a swastika, which closely resembles the one portrayed with the sun and moon. In the inner niche 'Om A Hum' has been painted as well as a few other letters, including a large 'A'. The most notable compositions in the inner niche are of two anthropomorphs, one with a horn-like head-dress and the other with a triangular head-dress.

On the highest part of the rear wall a swastika and several obscure figures have been painted. Below them is a vertical line on a triangular base which is intersected by shorter horizontal lines, the significance of which is unknown. Below it a party of three men on foot, one clearly armed with a bow and arrow, are attacking two 'brong (fig. 9). Two larger figures located above the three hunters are probably also part of the scene but because they are damaged it is difficult to tell. Both the 'brong have been hit by

arrows. The trauma this has caused the animals is trenchantly visible in the right-hand 'brong whose tail is pointing straight up in distress. The 'brong on the left is unique at lCe do in that its body is depicted with an inner line that parallels the outline of its body. The inner body has been pierced by an arrow while the outer line of the body shows no sign of disturbance. This suggests that the inner line represents the life-force (srog) of the animal.

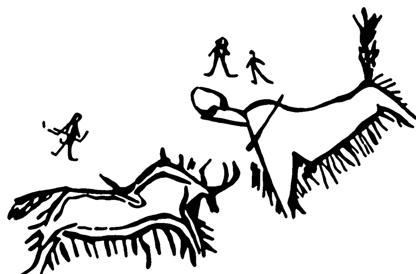


fig. 9

This red ochre composition is one of three on the rear wall which might predate the introduction of the horse. This is indicated not merely by the absence of horses in the painting, but also by the later addition of the horsemen flanking it. To the left of this aesthetically dominant picture, a disproportionately large horseman painted with a yellow-red pigment appears to be riding into the scene to render assistance. Likewise, to the right of the painting one of the two horsemen flanking the sun, moon and swastika described above is pretending to shoot at one of the wild yaks. An examination of the paint strokes establishes that they were painted by different hands from those which painted the 'brong. The flanking horsemen are also painted on different surfaces of the cave, further evidence that they did not originally belong to the composition. So here we have two adventitious horsemen who appear to have been integrated into a composition of which they were not original components. Perhaps they were added to offer magical help to their ancestral brethren who were without horses.



fig. 10

Below the early hunting scene an animal has been ambiguously painted with several thick lines, almost definitely at a much later time. Further below the hunting scene is another design similar to the one found near the top of the rear wall. To the left of this design is what appears to be a rkyang drawn in outline, and to the right an animal decorated with a triangular pattern. Underneath this patterned animal are a 'brong and rkyang in sienna pigment which stylistically resemble animals of Neolithic Eurasia (fig. 10). Underneath them are a rkyang, 'brong, and khyung or eagle which apparently make up one composition and date from the late phase (fig. 11). They were painted over compositions from the early phase, including a small portion of the rear of a deer-like animal. The rkyang, 'brong and khyung are the three most common animals



fig. 11

represented in the theriomorphic deities of the Byang thang. Mountain deities in particular take these forms.

Another early phase painting obscured by this triad of sacred animals consists of a hunter chasing an animal painted in sienna pigment. The hunter appears to be wearing a head-dress with two horns and is wielding a bow and arrow. Even though the front of the animal has been painted over, its skilful portrayal can still be appreciated. This scene of hunter and prey affords a tantalizing glimpse into the earliest paintings of the Byang thang which exhibit Neolithic characteristics in content and style. In a lower position on the rear wall a man on horseback is chasing a 'brong which is painted with a bunch of slashed lines. The lowest painting on the rear wall is that of a running 'brong in the style of the late phase.

The left wall of the lCe do cave has far fewer interesting paintings than the rest of the cave. The left inner wall includes a triad of figures which represent a 'brong, an antelope and what remotely looks like a khyung above them (fig. 12). Like the rkyang, 'brong and khyung triad we previously examined, this composition is not explicitly connected with hunting. We can surmise that a religious or social theme was intended here. One possible explanation for the picture is that it represents totemism, since each of the three animals belonged to the social and ritual complex of the 'brog pa whose identity they help to define. Totemism, a feature of social organization found in indigenous cultures throughout the world, is thought to have existed in ancient Tibet but little direct proof has surfaced to date. Also on the left inner wall, in a yellow-brown pigment, are a couple of mounted men.


fig. 12

On the outside edge of the outer wall a most interesting non-hunting motif shows four anthropomorphs circling a khyung (fig. 13). A fifth figure outlined with a piece of red ochre was added to complete the circle, probably at a later date. Once again we see the khyung occupying a ritual or symbolic role in the center stage. The frequency of the khyung in the art of gNam mtsho and of the Byang thang in general substantiates the legends that it was an important sacred figure in the pre-Buddhist period.[15] Below this composition are some tree-like designs and underneath them a blurry couple with joined arms. Above the khyung and his companions an endless knot is painted, a sign of the great epoch of Buddhism which superseded aboriginal culture.


fig. 13

Bon po Enclave

Although the Bon po had to vacate gNam mtsho many centuries ago, they managed to retain an area just north of the lake, called sPo che. This area now constitutes the sPo che township of dPal mgon county. This Bon po enclave is located about 20 kilometers north of the northwest corner of the lake and, to this day, the residents on the west side of sPo che ri profess the Bon faith. Surrounded by Buddhists on all sides, the struggle of this cultural island to maintain its ancient religious identity was intensified by the general atmosphere of the Communist period and its obsession with material progress. sPo che is completely cut off geographically from other Bon po communities. It is situated 310 kilometers east of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, 200 kilometers west of sNya rong, and nearly 200 kilometers north of Thob rgyal, these being the three closest Bon po enclaves.

In the 1940s, a small monastery called Khra gdong (Falcon Face) was built on a hill next to sPo che ri (Khra gdong ri is said to be the son of sPo che).[16] The monastery consisted of a 'du khang and several chapels. Khra gdong dgon pa was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution and has not been rebuilt. Twenty kilometers west of sPo che is a lake called Byu ru mtsho (Coral Lake).[17] During the time of the Zhang zhung kingdom it was called Gyer ru tsho (the District of Bon), but subsequently its name was corrupted to Bya ru which is pronounced almost identically in the A pa hor dialect. At Gyer ru mtsho is a cave called gLang chen phug (Elephant Cave) which is associated with the Zhang zhung saint gLang chen mtshams pa. There are ruins of Bon hermitages at Gyer ru mtsho. It is not known if they date from before or after the fall of Zhang zhung in the 7th or 8th century.

For the four and a half years, between 1945 and 1950, the young sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag lived at Gyer ru mtsho with his master, the then head scholar of Bon, Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan, who is better known as sGangs ru dpon slob.[18] It was at this time that sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag acquired tremendous first-hand experience of gNam mtsho and the adjoining areas. He became fluent in the language of the A pa hor and learned a great deal about the local history and culture. While the historicity of the Zhang zhung kingdom is debated in Western academic circles, for sLob dpon, his stay at gNam mtsho and later at Dang ra g.yu mtsho proved without a shadow of a doubt the existence of this ancient kingdom. He found evidence in the legends, customs, religion and language of the 'brog pa, and in the physical remains of ruins and caves. No longer merely a matter of Bon orthodoxy, Zhang zhung took on a tangible and credible identity for the young scholar. Khra gdong dgon pa, sGangs ru dpon slob and sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag were part of the culmination of a Bon cultural renaissance in the region. Theirs was essentially an effort to reclaim ancient Bon po territories in the ever-shifting ecclesiastical geography of Tibet.

This regional Bon renaissance had actually begun two and a half centuries earlier with the founding of a monastery, located about 40 kilometers north of sPo che, called dPal gshen bstan shel brag phug (the Glorious Bon Doctrine of the Cave of the Crystal

Cliff).[19] This monastery is often known by its short name Phug pa dgon to the herders of the region and is a branch of Ru lag g.yung drung ling, the main Bon po monastery in central Tibet. Phug pa dgon was founded by mKha' yag g.yung drung who hailed from Do smad khyung po sgang ru. He arrived at the site when he was 25 years of age and spent three years in the cave for which the monastery is named. He then built a residence (gzims chung), kitchen and storehouse. When he was 47, the invading Dzungars looted and pillaged the monastery, and decapitated him. The only person to survive was the tea-server named bsTan grags, who took revenge by propitiating Srid pa'i rgyal mo; the goddess sent an iron hail storm against the Dzungars, devastating their army.[20]

Phug pa dgon was a flourishing monastery until the Communist period under the able leadership of Shes rab bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan. Its wealth included the following: life-size gilt statues of the gShen rab of the three ages, a life-size silver statue of rNam par rgyal ba, a life-size bronze image of gShen rab, numerous bronze and terracotta images around one cubit tall, reliquary and other stupas, many volumes of scriptures, thang ka, silver offering bowls and vases, many musical instruments and elaborate 'cham costumes. Needless to say, during the Cultural Revolution all of these things were either destroyed or appropriated by Red Guards. The monastery has been rebuilt but it is a mere shadow of its former self. From 53 monks in the pre-modern period, it now has a small handful of poorly educated practitioners, and its extensive herds of income-raising livestock are no more. Highlights of its old liturgical calendar included a dGu 'cham just before the New Year, and teachings in the periods from the Third to the Eighth Months. Every year there were 149 days of pooja.

sTong shong phung

Returning to the lake shore, one can continue circumnavigating gNam mtsho in a clockwise direction from lCe do. Where the north and west shores meet is the headland of Thi rang smug po do, and beside it is the mouth of a stream called Bu nag rab kha. Upstream, but within sight of the lake, is the 'brog pa settlement of gShung chen and beyond it the road to sPo che. One now rounds the north side of gNam mtsho which is bounded by a huge plain to the north. The 'brog pa usually graze their animals away from this portion of the lake shore because its sandy soil offers scant pasturage. The one important landmark along this 30-kilometer shoreline is a set of two limestone formations at the margin of the land and water, called sNga mon bar. Leaving them behind—a process that requires many hours of walking—one is gradually able to see three stone buttresses to the east. This formation is called Rigs gsum mgon po, and in its proximity is a cluster of decrepit stupas and ma ni walls. Rigs gsum mgon po marks the beginning of a rugged series of headlands, bluffs and low-lying mountain ranges that hug the balance of the north shore of gNam mtsho. There are a number of dales and other sheltered places here which have supported human habitation for millennia.

In close proximity to the distinctive landmark of Rigs gsum mgon po is an escarpment

at the end of a range of hills overlooking gNam mtsho. On the south side of this escarpment are about 10 caves. In some, the six syllable mantra has been scrawled in red ochre, and in one cave two stupas have been painted in the same pigment alongside the figure of an animal in black. In the one shallow cave on the north side of the escarpment are the remains of paintings which have been reduced to unrecognizable blotches of red pigment. The largest and most important cave on the south face of the escarpment is sTong shong phug (the Cave that Holds One Thousand). Its name is said to originate in its ability to hold 1,000 sheep. It is occasionally used by the herders to shelter livestock but, as we shall see, the original significance of its name was very different.

According to local legend, sTong shong phug was an ancient Bon po stronghold[21] where they are thought to have lived and carried out their religious activities. The legend speaks of a time when gNam mtsho rose rapidly, inundating the surrounding areas, and the only way the Bon po could escape was to climb out of the roof of the cave on a celestial rope (dmu thag/rmu thag) into the sky, in a similar fashion to the first seven kings of the Yar lung dynasty (Khri bdun). However, first they had to magically create an open hole in the center of the cave. This legend neatly explains the unique hole that exists in the roof of the cave and, in a veiled manner, also acknowledges the power of ancient Bon po and their mastery over the elements. In the Ge sar epic, the expression 'pull up the dmu rope' was an action equivalent to the king's victory at the center of the earth (Stein: 223). sTong shong phug has never outlived its Bon associations and is, by and large, ignored by Buddhist residents and pilgrims. This cave is one of very few places at gNam mtsho which still wholly retains its Bon mantle of tradition.

It will be recalled that the place of residence of the goddess Yum was a fort called dGu khri stong shong (located at Khri rdus sdong tshogs). There is some compelling evidence for the fort in the way of ruins on the rocky platform in front of the cave, although the structural remains here are much less pronounced than at other ancient sites we explore further east. How large these structures were, indeed whether there were buildings here, cannot be ascertained from a visual appraisal of the site. Among the remains are circular arrangements of stones which resemble long disused sites for 'brog pa tents (nang ra). There is no question that the human-made structures found at sTong shong have been there for a very long time, as shown by the manner in the building stones are submerged into the rocky ground and the climax lichens which grow on them. These stones have not been disturbed for centuries. In the Yum sras tradition, dGu khri stong shong is a Zhang zhung era fort, and the ruins still faintly visible are potentially an ancient seat of Bon culture. In the Bon *Ti se'i dkar chag*, 18 castles which mark the frontiers of Zhang zhung are cited including one called Gu ri gnam mkhar.[22] This castle, by name and location, may be no other than dGu khri stong shong. If so, it was centered at gNam mtsho.

The riddle of the history of sTong shong phug does not end at its entrance but extends inside with cave paintings. Against the rear wall of this single chamber cave

and painted on a calcareous deposit are a number of chaotically placed compositions. Up high is a boldly painted Bon g.yung drung and beside it a teardrop shaped design. Below them, in crudely written dbu can letters, is the inscription "Kun 'tu bzang mkhyen" (Kun tu bzang po of Revered Wisdom), which was obviously composed in praise of the Primordial Buddha of the rDzogs chen tradition. Tu is misspelled 'tu and the writing is careless. Underneath this inscription is an anthropomorphic figure which resembles the figures in the fourth ancillary chamber of the kLu khang of bKra shis do chen. It has the same round head and features and outstretched, stick-like arms. The major differences between them are that this figure wears a tall peaked hat like those worn by monks in formal ceremonies (zhwa ser), and its body narrows at the waist, instead of being rectangular.

The unique similarity in the inscriptions and figures of the sTong shong phug and the kLu khang demonstrates an affinity between them which cannot be found at any other cave at gNam mtsho. Also painted on the rear wall of sTong shong phug are two mchod rten, of which one is well proportioned. Other lettering includes 'rgyo', 'A' and 'gyag'. rGyo and gyag are profane terms for sex. Another inscription reads "sdong khyung" (tree khyung) which may have had cosmological significance. The jumbled placement of the writing and motifs, the presence of lewd graffiti and the superimposition of inscriptions graphically indicate that the cave was the site of clashes between rival groups. This conflict could only have involved the Bon po and Buddhists who vied for control of the region, culminating in the defeat of the Bon po sometime between the 11th and 13th centuries. A pressing question is, what place did rDzogs chen occupy in the culture of the region? Was it adopted by the Bon po from the Buddhists, or did it develop indigenously at a much earlier date, as the Bon tradition maintains? If there was a common point of religious reference between the Bon and Buddhists of 1,000 years ago, the indications from sTong shong phug and the kLu khang are that it involved rDzogs chen.

The rivalry of the Bon po and Buddhists is but one chapter in the history of sTong shong phug. The dGu khri stong shong rdzong alludes to an earlier chapter, but what of a still earlier period? There are no ready answers, although the geomantic arrangement of the cave affords some clues. sTong shong phug is roundish in shape and about 15 to 20 meters across, with a six-meter-tall entrance. In the middle of the cave is a hole about three meters in diameter which extends for roughly eight meters in length before opening up on the top of the escarpment. The legend of the dmu thag and the hole may suggest that the cave was a ritual center where the underworld, intermediate zone and celestial realm were linked together. In the aboriginal and early Bon religions, the particular mix of elemental forces found at sTong shong phug must have been perceived as especially desirable. For Buddhists no such recourse to the site was necessary as the crux of the religion had shifted to the psychological dimension.

Bya do

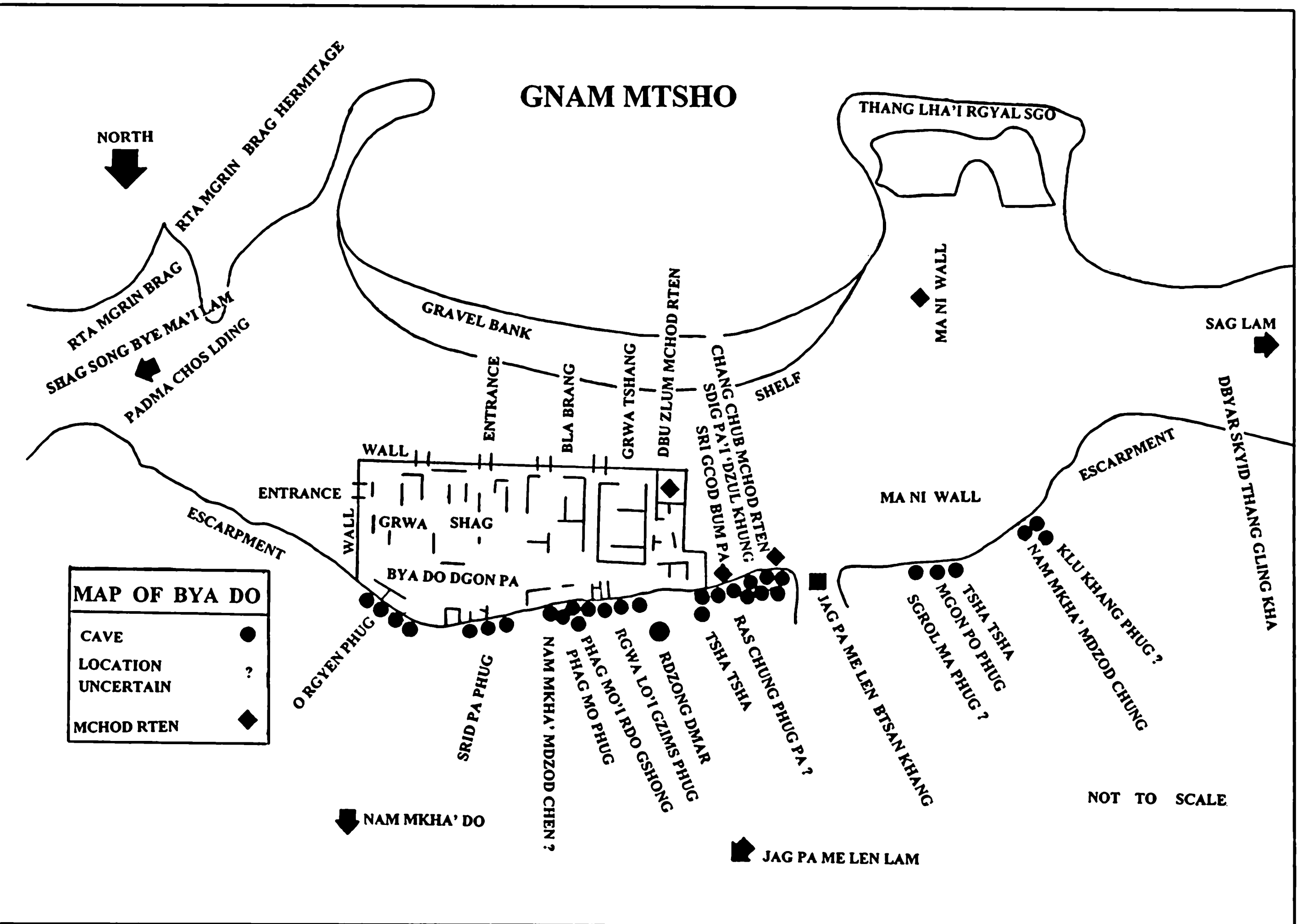
From sTong shong phug formidable bluffs force the pilgrim to pass through a broad valley parallel to gNam mtsho and to climb a ridge via a trail called the Sag lam, which is one of three access points to Bya do.[23] The Sag lam traverses the Nam mkha' do, a series of crags separated from the towering escarpments of Bya do by a ridge. From the summit of the Sag lam, the Sag la—the hidden Bya do site, one of the most stunning and remote at gNam mtsho—is visible. Bya do is sometimes called Bya dur (Bird Tomb) and is often pronounced in this manner by the A pha hor. Several people interviewed claim that the site was originally called Bya dur but little historical justification for this name has been found, although Bya do is often pronounced Bya dur. Bya dur is, in fact, the name of a Bon settlement located on the gTsang po river in Sa dga' county.

Bya do consists of two benches, the eastern of which is in front of a semicircular cove and the western one which directly abuts on gNam mtsho. Thus Bya do is hemmed in by near vertical walls that rise as much as 300 meters above the lake, the highest around gNam mtsho. The sienna, alabaster and vermilion cliffs of Bya do act as a natural wall limiting access to three trails, all of which climb over steep passes. The old monastery and most of the three dozen caves of Bya do overlook the semicircular cove. The cove is partially enclosed by two rocky capes which offer it some shelter from the turbulent waters of the open lake. On the western cape is an exquisite natural stone archway called Thang lha'i rgyal sgo. Until the Cultural Revolution, Bya do dgon pa stood directly in front of the cove, bounded on the opposite side by the colorful escarpment. This walled monastery, once the largest at gNam mtsho, was built of stone and sun dried mud bricks. It is now deserted.

At least a little of the ancient sacred geography of the site has been preserved. The escarpment behind the old monastery is said to represent a self-formed giant khyung swooping down to earth. The two principal peaks on each of the two escarpments are also believed to be the residence of the four dgra lha of the prayer flag. The name Bya do (Bird Headland) itself is ancient, but how it relates to the ancient mythology of the bird is unclear.

One of the most fantastic accounts from the era of Victorian exploration comes from the report of Kishen Singh compiled by Lt. Colonel T.G. Montgomery concerning Bya do. The relevant passage reads:

> "On the 25th (January, 1872) they reached Jador Sumdyaling monastery. Here they saw three pyramids or cones of earth of sun-dried mud, each about 500 feet in circumference, rising to a considerable height. The explorer went under these mounds by an artificial passage and found that one of them was open in the centre. The people say that they were originally all closed and that when a certain very devout Lama, who used to worship under one of these mounds, died he was taken up to heaven through the opening."


GNAM MTSHO
NORTH
RTA MGRIN BRAG HERMITAGE
RTA MGRIN BRAG
SHAG SONG BYE MA'I LAM
PADMA CHOS LDING
THANG LHA'I RGYAL SGO
GRAVEL BANK
ENTRANCE
BLA BRANG
GRWA TSHANG
DBU ZLUM MCHOD RTEN
CHANG CHUB MCHOD RTEN
SDIG PA'I 'DZUL KHUNG
SRI GCOD BUM PA
SHELF
MA NI WALL
SAG LAM
DBYAR SKYID THANG GLING KHA
ESCARPMENT
MA NI WALL
WALL
ENTRANCE
WALL
GRWA SHAG
BYA DO DGON PA
ESCARPMENT
MAP OF BYA DO
CAVE
LOCATION UNCERTAIN ?
MCHOD RTEN
O RGYEN PHUG
SRID PA PHUG
NAM MKHA' MDZOD CHEN ?
PHAG MO'I RDO GSHONG
PHAG MO PHUG
RGWA LO'I GZIMS PHUG
RDZONG DMAR
TSHA TSHA
RAS CHUNG PHUG PA ?
JAG PA ME LEN BTSAN KHANG
TSHA TSHA
MGON PO PHUG
SGROL MA PHUG ?
KLU KHANG PHUG ?
NAM MKHA' MDZOD CHUNG
NOT TO SCALE
NAM MKHA' DO
JAG PA ME LEN LAM

A systematic reconnaissance of Bya do dgon pa and its environs, carried out on three different occasions, has uncovered no pyramids. Was Kishen Singh's hyperbolic account of Bya do part of the mystification of Tibet to which the Victorian world was prone, exploiting the period's obsession with pyramids? The situation is all the more puzzling because Nain Singh, during his 1874 journey to gNam mtsho, makes no mention of pyramids at Bya do. However, Bya do, designated camp number 84, is recorded as having not one but two large monasteries near the banks of the lake by the pandit (Nain Singh: 185). He gives no other information on the site. Overawed by the magnificence of the scenery and pummelled by the extreme cold, it is probable that Kishen Singh actually had rTa mchog ngang pa do in mind, which boasts two pyramidal formations including one with a passageway in it.

The Buddhist presence at Bya do can be traced back to the 12th century saint rGwa lo tsa ba, whom we "met" at bKra shis do and Srin mo do. According to local tradition, rGwa lo rin po che meditated at Bya do; a reliquary mchod rten containing his remains was built in his cave. A small dgon pa or hermitage might have eventually been built but there is no record of such until a dGe lugs pa monastery was established on the site. After the major ecclesiastical reorganization of Tibet under the leadership of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Bya do devolved to the dGe lugs pa. Sometime during the concomitant rule of the Eighth Dalai Lama and Sixth Pan chen Lama (1758-1780), a monastery named Bya do bKra shis bsam gtan gling (Bya do, the Place of Auspicious Meditation) was founded by bLo gros chos 'phel. This monk from bKra shis lhun po was highly adept in the Lam rim tradition (Graded Path to Enlightenment). He built the new monastery around the meditation cave of rGwa lo rin po che and his reliquary mchod rten. The remains of this mchod rten can still be seen.

bLo gros chos 'phel was succeeded by bLo bzang chos 'phel and thus began the tradition of the Bya do lineage. All members of the lineage are thought to be reincarnations of bLo gros chos 'phel. bLo bzang chos 'phel invited his teacher, Ke'u tshang 'jam dbyangs smon lam, to Bya do. 'Jam dbyangs smon lam composed a text on monastic discipline (Vinaya), which became the basis of this tradition at Bya do. He also presented the Bya do sprul sku with a gilt statue of Sakyamuni Buddha and a set of the bKa' 'gyur.

The third lineage holder, rGyal mtshan chos 'phel, is best remembered for his face-to-face encounter with the god gNyan chen thang lha. The mountain god, who appeared to him in the guise of an A pa hor shepherd, bestowed many gifts on the sprul sku. rGyal mtshan chos 'phel invited the Ser ba sNgags pa college lama bKa' 'gyur nam mkha' bstan skyod to Bya do to teach lam rim to the monastery. The fourth in the Bya do lineage was Chos 'phel rgya mtsho, a fine scholar and doctor, whose lifetime overlapped that of the 13th Dalai Lama. Chos 'phel rgya mtsho brought dPal ldan lha mo practices from rNam rgyal monastery in Lhasa and built a larger 'du khang. As a result of his three-year Yamantaka retreat, he acquired mystic powers. It is said that he had a ritual skull cup with a perpetual flame issuing from it, and after his three-year

retreat was completed he cut his hair and found that it was resistant to fire. These are just two of the many miraculous events connected to Chos 'phel rgya mtsho. He probably died in his sixties.

The fifth Bya do rin po che, 'Jam dbyang sangs rgyas, was born circa 1932 in the region. He only lived for 20 years. Before his death, the ailing sprul sku was put under the charge of a monk named sKal bzang rgyal mtshan. The sprul sku decided to visit his home with his attendant. En route, they stopped at a tent to rest, during which time 'Jam dbyang sangs rgyas proclaimed that a reincarnation would be born into the family. At home, the condition of the sprul sku deteriorated further and sKal bzang rgyal mtshan was forced to return to the monastery for more help. Before he left he offered the sprul sku three Chinese silver coins and a Kha btags which pleased the latter very much. The sprul sku exclaimed it was like receiving a horse, the most prized possession of the 'brog pa. The sprul sku also convinced sKal bzang rgyal mtshan before he left to accept the keys of his bla brang so that he could help refurbish it. In 1952, after the death of 'Jam dbyang sangs rgyas, sKal bzang rgyal mtshan was elected the treasurer (phyag mdzod) of Bya do dgon pa.

In 1954, the Year of the Horse, the sixth in the Bya do lineage, bsTan 'dzin 'byung gnas chen, was born into a family preordained by his predecessor at a settlement called mGo sbug. At this time it was also understood why the last sprul sku had equated the offering sKal bzang rgyal mtshan had made with a horse; it was a veiled reference to the year of the birth of his successor. He was formally recognized as the Bya do sprul sku at three years of age by the present Dalai Lama. He was enthroned and lived at Bya do for one year before going into exile in India in 1959.[24]

During the time of the Tibetan uprising in 1959, a band of Khams pa who were veterans of ongoing battles with Chinese troops in Nang chen sought refuge at Bya do dgon pa for three months.[25] Not long afterwards, a small squad of Chinese soldiers arrived at Bya do dgon pa to bring it under the authority of the Communists. The handful of soldiers were no match for the 60 angry monks and were easily defeated. Furious at this loss, the Chinese returned with a much larger force, seized 14 monks, brought them some distance from the monastery, and summarily executed them. In the Cultural Revolution the monastery was razed to the ground and permission has not been granted to rebuild it. An attempt was made in the late 1980s by local herders to begin reconstruction, but the shipment of wood they were bringing in for the new roof of the assembly hall was interdicted by the authorities. Permission for meditators to use the caves has been refused by the dPal mgon county officials. Bya do dgon pa stands in utter desolation, its crumbling walls mute testament to the brutalities of modern Chinese history.

Financial support for the monastery came from two main sources. Annually bKra shis lhun po monastery would provide 65 'bo (1 'bo = roughly 14 kilos) of grain to the monastery, and 30 khal (1 khal is the equivalent to the capacity of one of the two main

saddle bags a yak carries) of butter, tea, incense, cloth and offering scarves to Bya do. The main source of income, however, were the monastery's herds of a minimum of 1,000 yaks and 10,000 sheep. These animals were tended by seven groups of 'brog pa called Sa skya shog kha bdun. The Sa skya shog kha bdun were centered around Bying lung, a settlement north of Bya do and comprised: 1) sDe rnying, 2) sBro sbyor, 3) Kre ba, 4) Bya rig, 5) Shog chen, 6) sDe rab, and 7) She ma.

The chapel built to enshrine the meditation cave of rGwa lo rin po che, the first structure of Bya do bKra shis bsam gtan gling, became known as the root Grwa tshang. Its most precious relic was a tooth believed to have belonged to the Buddha. More than 100 years after it was founded, during the time of the fourth lineage holder, a complex was built nearby called the Bya do Grwa tshang which included an assembly hall of 12 pillars and several chapels. In the assembly hall were life-size statues of the Buddha, Maitreya, Manjushri and Chos 'phel rgya mtsho. Other images included Yab sras gsum and a stucco statue of Pan chen chos rgyan, and a complete collection of the bka' 'gyur (canon) and bstan 'gyur (commentaries).

Adjacent to the 'du khang was a mgon khang featuring images of dPal ldan lha mo, Yamantaka and the three aspects of Chos rgyal. Also on the ground level, facing gNam mtsho, was the sKal bzang lha khang containing four statues of a precious alloy (li khra?), and other statues of Gu ru rin po che, Yamantaka, the seventh Panchen Lama, Green Tara and Jag pa me len (a protector of Bya do). The walls of this chapel were decorated with murals of the Sangs rgyas stong sku. On the second level of the 'du khang complex was the Yamantaka chapel with its three-dimensional Yamantaka mandala. Adjacent to this chapel were the personal quarters (gzims chung) of the Bya do sprul sku.

East of the 'du khang was another complex of chapels, the bla brang. In the main chapel of the ground floor was a larger-than-life gilt statue of rJe tshe 'dzin ma (long life aspect of Je tsong kha pa) and an approximately 60-centimeter-tall image of sPyan ras gzigs, the Thousand-armed Avalokitesavara and rNam thos sras. Next to the main chapel of the bla brang was a mgon khang. In it were images of Yamantaka, mGon po, dPal ldan lha mo, Chos rgyal, rNam thos sras and dPal mgon bram gzugs, and a special shrine called Lha mo'i rten 'dos sgam. Also on the ground floor was the winter residence of the sprul sku, which included a kitchen and storage room called dGa' tshal (Happy Garden).

Chapels on the second floor of the bla brang included Khra chung, Shel khang nyi sbug, and the sGrol ma lha khang with its silver statues of the sGrol ma 'jigs pa brgyad skyob (the Taras that Protect Against the Eight Fears). Also on the second level was a bKa' 'gyur lha khang which enshrined the Buddhist canon and commentaries, a one-meter-tall, gem-studded silver reliquary stupa, and a statue of rGyal mtshan chos 'phel. The final chapel of the bla brang was the Kun gsal lha khang. It housed a two-meter-tall silver reliquary mchod rten and statue of the founder, bLo gros chos 'phel, an image of

the Yab sras gsum, and a selection of scriptures, including the *Yab sras gsum gsung 'bum* and the *Prajnaparamita,* written in gold ink.

Until the Communist period, Bya do was one of the most important and largest monasteries on the Byang thang.[26] Its remote location protected it from some of the problems that beset monasteries in the main population centers. Reportedly, it was very well run and maintained high standards of discipline and practice. Bya do observed the same Vajrakilaya, Yamantaka, Chakrasamvara and Hayagriva rituals as Ser ba monastery in Lhasa and had its strongest connection with Ke'u tshang ri khrod in Lhasa. In fact, Bya do rin po che, 'Jog po rin po che and Ke'u tshang rin po che are collectively known as the Ke'u tshang bla ma gsum. Bya do dgon pa was granted autonomous status and, unlike adjoining areas, was not part of the estate of the Pan chen Lama.

The old walled monastic compound was approximately 200 meters long from east to west, and 70 meters long from north to south. The monks' quarters (grwa shag) were located in the east half of the compound and consisted of individual residences made of adobe. Each monk had his own small compound which was ideal for religious practice and mental peace. In the late 1940s, sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag came to Bya do to decorate the private chapel of a relatively well-to-do monk who lived in one of these compounds. The Bya do grwa tshang was situated near the west wall of the compound, and the Bya do sprul sku's estate (bla brang) stood between it and the grwa shag. Located in the southwest corner was the largest stupa at the monastery, the dBu zlum mchod rten.

Outside the compound, in the defile that separates the two escarpments of Bya do, is a ruined btsan khang. This is the shrine of Jag pa me len, who has been the protector of Bya do since the time of the occupation of the site by bKa' brgyud pa lamas, if not before. His emanation is called Shing skyong kun dka' rgyal mtshan, a red man who offers food to yogis and quickly destroys enemies (sTag lung rtse sprul: 21). Jag pa me len, originally a 'Brug pa sub-sect deity, is in the retinue of Rahula. There is a legend that Rahula used to manifest as a ball of fire and his retinue as smaller balls of fire at the Jag pa me len btsan khang. When the local protector manifested in this form he was called bTsan rgod jag pa me len. The location of the shrine in the parting of an otherwise continuous rock barricade left it exposed to heavily magnified winds. A watercourse which ran during flash floods flowed past the base of the btsan khang. The Jag pa me len btsan khang was purposely built in the most exposed place at Bya do, which benefits its function as the dwelling place of a potent elemental spirit. The Jag pa me len trail begins at the shrine, passes behind the Bya do escarpment, winds steeply up to the top of the Nam mkha' do and then down into the valley that leads either back to sTong shong phug or eastwards.

Further west, at the base of the Sag lam, was the dByar skyid thang gling kha (the Garden of the Plain of Summer Happiness). This is where the Bya do sprul sku erected their tents for the summer bathing festival called Chab bzhugs. An enclosure was built with three partitions—one for cooking, one for horses, and one for the sprul sku's tent.

The square base of stone which was specially constructed for the tent of the Bya do lamas is still intact. The bathing festival was held at the end of the summer and lasted for 10 days. This was a time for the monks to enjoy themselves, rest and prepare for the long, hard winter of the Byang thang. At the top of the Bya do escarpment directly above the old dgon pa is the remains of a bsangs khang where incense offerings were made. There are also at Bya do ruins of stupas and ma ni walls, two of which have been rebuilt.

To the west of the Jag pa me len btsan khang is a cave called mGon po phug, around which is a well-built facade. Inside it are rang byung images of the crow-headed manifestation of mGon po and one of mGon po ber nag (sTag lung rtse sprul: 21). Next to it is a tsha tsha repository and a smaller cave which may be the sGrol ma phug. Further to the west is a large cave around which are the remains of a facade called Nam mkha' mdzod chen. Buddhist practitioners are said to have met here before the monastery was built. This is also where the klu meet to fulfil their wishes and where Gu ru rin po che is supposed to have hidden his drums and cymbals, as well as having a self-formed white letter 'A' (sTag lung rtse sprul: 20).

Near Nam mkha' mdzod chen are two small caves. One of them is the O rgyan phug which has a self-formed image of Gu ru rin po che's back and shoulders. This cave also boasts a Nor bdag dzam lha nag po rang byung and is said to be where fortunate people receive endowments (sTag lung rtse sprul: 20). The other small cave near Nam mkha' mdzod chen might be the kLu khang phug. Inside the kLu khang phug are a self-formed 'Jigs byed, a black khyung, a lion-faced dakini, and the sun and moon (sTag lung rtse sprul: 20). At the kLu khang phug, the lama bLo gros rab yangs (the founder of Bya do) made images of the Buddha, Yab sras gsum, Mi la ras pa, and others (sTag lung rtse sprul: 20).

Most of the caves of Bya do are located in the escarpment east of the Jag pa me len btsan khang. Beginning from the west side of the escarpment, the first cave encountered is the single largest cave at the Bya do gnas chen. Beside its entrance are the ruins of a shrine called Srid gcod bum pa. It is believed that when someone circles it they are freed from disease (sTag lung rtse sprul: 21). Next to this ruined shrine is a white band of rock on the cliff which symbolizes the way to liberation, according to sTag lung rtse sprul.

A few meters to the east is another tsha tsha repository and a little past this a cliff wall with prayers to the goddess Bhagavati carved in it. A few more meters to the east is the sDig pa'i 'dzul khung, a tiny cave with ma ni and vajra mantras engraved in it. Its surface is highly polished from centuries of pilgrims squeezing through its small opening. This cave may also be the Bar do'i phrang lam which only people with sufficient merit can pass through, and which has a zhabs rjes above it made by a Karma pa (sTag lung rtse sprul: 21). To the east of the sDig pa'i 'dzul khung is a cave containing the remains of several mchod rten, and still further to the east are the ruins of a Byang chub mchod rten. To the east of this is the west wall of the monastery and within it is a cave adjacent

to a tsha tsha repository. Either this cave or the one with several mchod rten is probably the Ras chung pa phug. Inside his cave, the saint Ras chung pa (1083-1161) is said to have obtained water from a secret passageway (sTag lung rtse sprul: 21).

Directly behind the crumbling walls of the 'du khang is a cave which might have been used by rGyal ba lo ras pa. Behind, and to the east of the 'du khang, are two caves which once had structures around them. The one to the west is the rGwa lo gzims phug, the nucleus of the Bya do monastery. In the vicinity is a Blue Tara rang byung, rang byung images of the buddhas of the past, present and future, and the handprints of Gu ru rin po che, made when he opened the cliff to obtain water (sTag lung rtse sprul: 21). About 30 meters above and a little to the east of the rGwa lo phug is rDzong dmar, which had a new facade built in the late 1980s. The deity Phur ba is said to manifest here. Gu ru rin po che and many other saints are said to have visited this cave (sTag lung rtse sprul: 21). To the east of rGwa lo phug is another cave that was enshrined by chapels. This is probably Nam mkha' mdzod chung. On the wall of this cave is a rang byung Thang lha yab yum surrounded by the kLu rigs sde lnga (sTag lung rtse sprul: 21). To the east of this cave is Phag mo'i rdo gzhong (the Stone Tray of rDo rje Phag mo), a natural well at the base of the escarpment where the Bya do lineage of lamas used to procure their water. Reputedly, it produced a superb quality water, but since the Communist period it has become foul and has almost dried up.

Above the well is a cave with a naturally occurring pillar which is believed to represent a poisonous snake. It also has a self-manifested throne of gNyan chen thang lha and footprints of dancing dakinis. Also in this cave is the Thar pa'i 'dzul khung (Passage to Liberation) and a path to the lower and upper realms (Ngan song dang mtho ris kyi lam)(sTag lung rtse sprul: 22). Aspirations generated here for the welfare of all sentient beings are thought to bring much benefit (sTag lung rtse sprul: 22) Beside this cave is a corollary chamber, inside which is a zhabs rjes of 'Bri gung skyob pa. Below it is a self-formed image of sPyan ras gzigs (sTag lung rtse sprul: 22).

To the east of these caves is the Phag mo phug and after it a niche in the escarpment which once held a mchod rten or shrine. Along the eastern half of the Bya do compound is a group of three caves that includes Srid pa phug and another group of four caves at the eastern extremity of the compound which includes O rgyan phug. Somewhere in the heights is said to be a cave which once belonged to the renowned lama rGod tshang pa, called rGod tshang (Vulture's Nest).[27] To this day, lammergeiers nest in the cliffs of Bya do.

To the east of the old monastery's walls is a large stone slab called Pad ma chos lding, which is marked with many zhabs rjes of the dakinis. This is where sky burials were conducted. East of the Bya do cove is a rocky mount overlooking gNam mtsho named rTa mgrin brag, which contains a huge self-manifested bust of the deity rTa mgrin. On its opposite side, just above the lake shore, are the ruins of a small hermitage called rTa mgrin bsam khang.

To the east of rTa mgrin brag is the third access point to Bya do, the Shag song bye ma'i lam. This trail passes over a precipitous range of hills and reaches the highest point on the gNam mtsho skor lam before it descends to Lug do. This country is one of the last refuges of blue sheep in the region and is rumored to support the rare Tibetan brown bear. Bears were reported in the general area in the 1920s (Hayden and Cosson: 122,123). The blue sheep was far more common at gNam mtsho before the mass killing of animals in the Communist period. Unless extreme care is taken this fine animal could go suffer the fate of the rkyang (wild ass) and antelope, which have disappeared from gNam mtsho in the last 35 years.

The most impressive natural feature at Bya do is Thang lha'i rgyal sgo (the Superior Doorway of gNyan chen thang lha), a large natural archway overlooking gNam mtsho. It resembles an elephant, which explains its alternative name, gLang chen po (Big Elephant). It is situated on the end of the rocky salient that bounds the Bya do cove on the west. The formation is about 50 meters long and 20 meters tall and its archway is about eight meters tall and five meters wide. It was first brought to the attention of the Western world by Kishen Singh. According to the report compiled from his findings, "The explorer saw a gigantic doorway cut in the rock through which the Lamas say the god Ninchen-thanglha passes; its height is about 25 feet." (Kishen Singh: 136) The holy mountain and lake come together more closely at Thang lha'i rgyal go than anywhere else, an arrangement that provides a stunning view and lends credence to the myth of their ecstatic embrace. From the entrance of Thang lha'i rgyal sgo, gNyan chen thang lha, 60 kilometers away, is directly in line with gNam mtsho. This is the superlative geographical alignment of the Divine Dyad which urges pilgrims to perceive their essential oneness.


Thang lha'i rgyal sgo

The numinous status of Thang lha'i rgyal go is validated by the collection of self-formed images said to be found on its rock walls, which ratify the worthiness of Thang lha'i rgyal sgo as an object of reverence and sanctity. These rang byung images include the hoof print of dPal ldan lha mo's mule, the hoof print of the protector Dam can, the staff print of Gu ru rin po che, a huge zhabs rjes which some say belongs to the Buddha, likenesses of a mGon po and of rTa mgrin and, on the trunk of the elephant, the well formed handprints of Gu ru rin po che. On the east side of the formation are a self-formed rdo rje, zhabs rjes and staff print of a Karma pa; on the west side, a self-manifested Om A' Hum'; on the south side, a white rang byung letter 'A'; and, on the north side, a

hand print of Maitreya (sTag lung rtse sprul: 20). The identities and amount of rang byung objects are always open to amendment and revision, a process that typifies the ability of the landscape to accommodate cultural or social innovations.

gNyan chen thang lha is said to appear through this timeless portal, making it one of the key places at gNam mtsho where the god is believed to manifest. Bya do rin po che describes Thang lha'i rgyal sgo as the "mind door", a special place where the essential quality of the mind can be experienced. The coming together of the mountain and lake in perfect aesthetic harmony through the portal serves as a metaphor for the merging of wisdom and method which leads to enlightenment. Particularly for Buddhists, this is defined within the intellectual framework of the Chakrasamvara tantra.

In modern Tibetan religion, Thang lha'i rgyal sgo is one of many topographical features acting as a reference point for the faith and beliefs of residents and pilgrims alike. Through its supernatural associations, it vouches for the validity and propriety of religious dogma. Nevertheless, Thang lha'i rgyal sgo has a peripheral role to play in Tibetan religion. Even at Bya do dgon pa it was only a backdrop of marginal importance to events inside the monastery. In the pre-Buddhist period, when the natural world and religion were more closely wedded its status must have been quite different. The co-mingling of gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha from the portal must have had cosmogonic significance for the prehistoric A pa hor. Additionally, Thang lha'i rgyal sgo could have functioned as a magico-ritual site.

Rang byung images aside, the other distinguishing physical feature of gnas chen is the presence of byin brlabs. During Kishen Singh's two-day visit to Bya do, he reported sacred fossils called Naidhowas being found there (Kishen Singh: 135,136). The most popular sanctified substance found at Bya do are small grey fossilized conch shells, called dung rang byung. Sometimes much larger white conch shells wash up on the shore from the Bya do cove and are highly prized. Another kind of byin brlabs, a fossil found in the area, is mKha' 'gro'i mtheb kyu (Thumb Prints of the Dakinis). Legend has it that these were magically produced when a Karma pa offered pieces of pressed rtsam pa to the dakinis.

Lug do and Ra mo do

Heading east from Bya do the next gnas chen on the mtsho skor lam is Lug do (Sheep Headland), situated on another cove at the base of a tall escarpment that plunges into the lake. There are half a dozen caves of various sizes located here but what is most noteworthy are the remains of what the 'brog pa casually call a Bon po dgon pa.[28] According to the 'brog pa, before the time of Gu ru rin po che the Bon po maintained a monastery here, one of several supposedly found on the north shore of gNam mtsho. The age and function of the site cannot be determined from a visual survey of what remains on the surface. The diversity of ruins suggests that Lug do supported a variety of structures.

As with mKhar ro or Chos gong, for example, we must consider the possibility that fixed settlements at gNam mtsho were established as early as the Neolithic 4,000 or 5,000 years ago. If this is true, the legacy of human settlement patterns might have remained unbroken through the Metal Age[29] and Zhang zhung period in the centuries that preceded the unification of the Plateau under the Yar lung kings. At this stage, because of a severe lack of archaeological data, we have no choice but to see the pre-Buddhist sites of gNam mtsho as milestones in the development of civilization in the region over the millennia, rather than emblematic of a particular period. With so little known about the prehistory of the region the field of enquiry must remain open.

There are three types of ruins at Lug do, one of which consists of three mounds found in front of the caves which are two, three and five meters in diameter. The identification of these tumuli is far from certain but they appear to be barrows (bang so). Tombs with tumuli dating from the Metal Age to the close of the Yar lung dynasty have been discovered in at least 19 places in Tibet including Nag chu, A mdo county, Sog county and 'Bri ru county (Chayet: 72), all of which are not too distant from gNam mtsho (see Appendix Five).

The second type of human-made remains found at Lug do are foundation walls. At one meter thick, these walls are the most monumental at gNam mtsho. Only a small portion of these well-built foundations are still above the surface of the ground. From their size and the quality of construction it can be deduced that relatively large communal structures once stood here. According to the *Sui Annals*, the ancient Tibetans built multi-storeyed towers as tall as 33 meters (Beckwith 1984: 105). In Tibetan sources the architectural prowess of pre-Buddhist Tibetans is also documented.

The most intriguing type of structure found at Lug do consists of several rings made of stones set into the ground. Directly below the largest cave at Lug do is a stone circle about seven meters in diameter with a crescent arrangement of stones in its center. Its appearance points to it being a grave of the cist type. So well represented are tombs of this shape in Tibet that Chinese archaeologists have classed "round graves" as one of the five major types of archaeological sites found in Tibet (Hu xu tru: 224-226).[30] There are also several smaller stone rings in its proximity which lack a central core of stones, and these, rather than being graves, are possibly old camp sites. A little further afield is the largest stone ring at gNam mtsho, which measures about 17 meters in diameter, with a nucleus of stones three meters in diameter. It is built of stones embedded in the ground around the structure's perimeter. On one side it was either disturbed or purposely built in an irregular manner. Pilgrims call this stone ring Thang lha'i 'bon zhon (the Measuring Tray of gNyan chen thang lha), which refers to a vessel, the size of which fulfils the appetite of the holy mountain. Ancient Bon temples, as evidenced in remains discovered at Khyung lung dngul mkhar in mNga' ris province, could have been circular in shape (Tucci 1973: 57).

Some herders also believe that such rings called bying gur or tshor shul and reportedly found all over the Byang thang, are the sites of giant tents erected by potentates

long ago. Historical reference to the existence of large tents is found in the *Tang Annals*, in which there is a description of an elaborate tent used by Tibetan kings as a summer headquarters (Snellgrove and Richardson: 64,65). In sBra chen rdzong, before the Communist takeover, the local headmen had a tent made of yak hair which was said to have held 1,000 people (Ma 1991: 275). Non-funerary structures that consist of three stone rings and two circular stone platforms have been discovered at Neolithic mKha ro, which has set a very ancient precedent for round architecture.[31]

From Lug do, the circumambulatory trail skirts around the cove at Lug do and then between the two outcroppings that make up Rag mo do (She-Goat Headland). There is also a higher trail which circumvents both Rag mo do and Lug do via the Gag pa la, which is preferred by some pilgrims because it is shorter. Another alternative is to climb over the rocky bluffs that overlook Rag mo do, a particularly demanding route. In these bluffs are about six caves including one with a g.yung drung painted in red ochre in addition to a couple of indistinguishable figures. Due to the difficulty of the terrain and insufficient fodder, Rag mo do is infrequently visited.

At the more accessible east end of Rag mo do is a large cave, about 20 meters long, which is used to corral sheep. Beside it is a tunnel-like cave about 15 meters long with the six syllable mantra painted in its entrance way. Adjacent to this is a shallow cave which contains the only truly polychromic rock painting at gNam mtsho. The painting depicts a mchod rten with a pyramidal spire in red ochre, yellow ochre and white to represent the different stages of the structure (fig. 14). Adjacent to it are two unidentified curvilinear designs in red ochre (fig. 14). Also in the same cave is an anthropomorphic figure, several unintelligible paintings and, in black pigment, linear designs which might represent highly stylized humans.

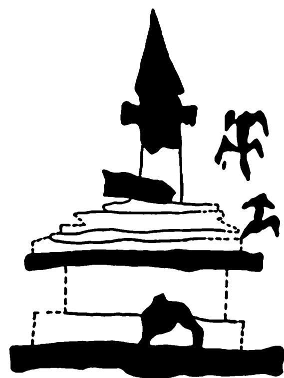
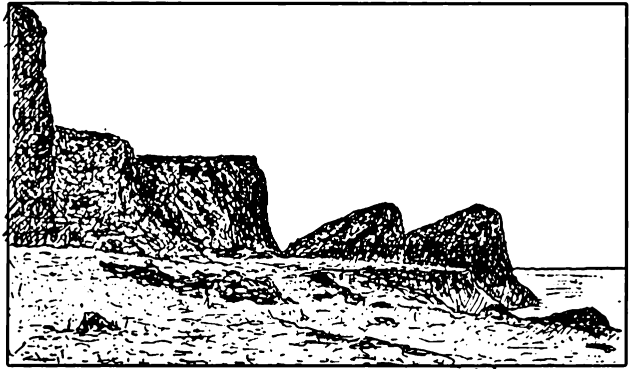


fig. 14

rTa mchog ngang pa do, bra gu rta ra and snying do

From Ra mo do, the mtsho skor trail crosses a plain before passing in front of a stretch of cliffs known as Khyi rgan gag pa do (Barking Old Dog Headland). Just east of this is the third longest headland that projects into gNam mtsho, rTa mchog ngang pa do (Superior Horse-Goose Headland). The most prominent landmark here is the rTa chog (Horse Ears), two reddish, pyramidal formations that indeed resemble a horse's ears. Two sacred hills at Ngang pa do were noted by Kishen Singh during his explorations (Kishen Singh: 136). One can only wonder if he confused his pyramids with them. There is a phonetic similarity between the name of the headland and the formation which are often confused in speech.[32]


rTa mchog ngang pa do

The rTa mchog Bon po dgon pa is situated on the summit of one of the rTa chog formations.[33] Until recently, it could only be reached by a stone stair case found in a fissure of the horse's ear.[34] From a short distance away the small crumbling walls of the ancient monument are visible and cover not more than a few square meters. According to the oral history of the region, this was a pre-Buddhist monastery of much importance and sanctity, but the details of its history have been lost. Given its commanding position, it might well have been a fort or observatory rather than a monastery.

At the base of the horse's ear with the ruins, near the waterline, is a cave named gNam mtsho phyug mo'i phug. At the foot of the rocky rib that runs the length of the headland, opposite the rTa chog formations, are several caves used by native sngags pa and nuns. Further out on the headland are the bases of two ruined mchod rten, which purportedly belong to the Bon po. Beyond these is a conical pile of stones conceived as the self-formed incense burner (bsangs khang) of gNyan chen thang lha. Next to it is a round protuberance called gNam mtsho phyug mo'i nu ma (the Breast of gNam mtsho phyug mo). Walking further out on the headland one finds a cylindrical sink hole approximately seven meters deep called gThang lha'i ja mdong (the Tea Churn of gNyan chen thang lha). Some distance from this are several unnamed caves which have not entirely lost their associations with Bon. The last holy site at rTa mchog ngang pa do is a disused and possibly ancient sky burial site. One must return the same way past the rock formations of the headland because it ends abruptly at a sheer wall which plunges into gNam mtsho.

From rTa mchog ngang pa do, a large plain that extends for some 10 kilometers called sKam thang must be traversed. In the middle of this plain is a blue tarn which helps to diminish its monotony. North of sKam thang is the 'brog pa settlement of mGo sbug, the birthplace of the present Bya do sprul sku, bsTan 'dzin 'byung gnas. At the east end of the desolate sKam thang is a marshy plain called A la thang. On its northern fringe is the 'brog pa camp of A la. The east side of A la thang is bounded by a pass called Dug ri la (Poison Mountain Pass). This pass forms the border between 'Dam gzhung county in the Lhasa prefecture to the east, and dPal mgon county in the Nag chu prefecture to the west. Traditionally, the Dug ri la marked the division between the estates of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas. On the east side of Dug ri la is a narrow valley named Ra gzhung which is separated from the lake by a range of hills. The adobe homes

of the two gzhi ma here have largely replaced tents as homes in the eastern Byang thang over the last 20 years.

At the eastern end or mouth of the Ra gzhung valley, near the summer camp of Ma ra ri des, the valley is bisected by a hill. On top of this hill is Bra gu rta ra (the Horse Corral of Bra gu ngom ngan), a rectangular enclosure approximately 55 meters long from east to west, and 30 meters wide from north to south. The formidable two to two-and-a-half meter tall wall around the enclosure is larger and more massively built than any contemporary structure made by the 'brog pa in the region. Some herders say that they lack the manpower and skill to build something this large today, which adds to its mystique. In the middle of the enclosure against the south wall are the foundations of what evidently once were buildings.

To the east of the ruins, and also against the south wall, is a two-meter-tall la tho with a prayer flag mast situated on a rock outcropping. This shrine to Bra gu ngom ngan is the ritual heart of the site. The native shepherds come here to pray and offer incense to their most famous ancestor. To the east of the enclosure is a two-meter-tall boulder called Thang lha'i rta phur (gNyan chen thang lha's Horse Stake), where the veneration of horses takes place. Prayers and offerings made to the yul lha gNyan chen thang lha are purported to ensure the health and fecundity of the herders' horses. Offerings left at Thang lha'i rta phur are all related to horses and include old bits and braided reins and halters. During the Cultural Revolution Bra gu rta ra was damaged and the shrines destroyed. It was subsequently rehabilitated and used as a pen for the collectivized livestock of the 'brog pa. Since the move towards economic liberalization in the 1980s it has reverted to its religious function.

The horse corral is attributed to Bra gu ngom ngan, the ancestral hero of the A pa hor of gNam mtsho. sTag lung pa histories maintain that he was a contemporary of the 13th century lama Sangs rgyas yar byon. The 'brog pa, however, in their rather ambiguous oral history, sometimes claim that he lived before the time of Gu ru rin po che. Most probably Bra or Bra gu was the name of the pre-13th century ruling family or clan of the region which professed Bon as their religion. Bra gu ngom ngan, the founder of the lineage, is confusingly referred to as both a ma sangs and mes lha by some people, but the import is the same: he is the deified ancestor of the A pa hor.

According to legends surrounding him, his mother was a human, his father a lha, and his wife a srin mo. Once more we see how, in the ancient substrate of myths, the ancestry of the 'brog pa is attributed to the pre-Buddhist pantheon. The pedigree of Bra gu ngom ngan is liable to be related to the divinities of the Divine Dyad, but exactly how seems to have been forgotten. Bra gu rta ra has every indication of being an old fort or stronghold that belonged to the Bra gu lineage who, because of its legendary importance, we can assume provided the rulers of the region. With the conversion of gNam mtsho to Buddhism, which was finalized in the 13th century, the Bra gu seem to have disappeared as a political and social force. Reportedly, not one A pa hor family claims direct descent from Bra gu ngom ngan; thus he is a somewhat generalized ancestral

figure.

The legend which explains the existence of Bra gu rta ra claims that Bra gu ngom ngan built it to hold his 100 horses. Needless to say, a single man who owned 100 horses was a powerful figure. Bra gu ngom ngan shared his corral with his brother A jo pon brag, who only owned one horse. The extreme disparity in their wealth led to certain problems. The 'brog pa humorously relate how Bra gu ngom ngan regularly thought that since his brother had only one horse, he should give it to him to relieve himself of the trouble of looking after it. On the other hand, A jo pon brag believed that because he only had one horse and his brother had 100 he should be given a few. With vastly different expectations, the two learned to make the most of their situation. This story mirrors a 'brog pa cultural reality: that of great disparities in wealth which potentially occur in a family when a younger brother decides to strike out on his own without recourse to his family's herds.

In Chapter Four we saw how Bra gu ngom ngan managed to defeat rTa rgo rin po che. Evidence for the battle fought between them is said to be found in the rocks supposedly pockmarked by arrows west of the corral. gNyan chen thang lha, elated with his victory over rTa rgo, offered Bra gu ngom ngan anything he wished. Bra gu ngom ngan, to the mountain god's consternation, asked for beautiful gNam mtsho phyug mo, whom the mountain had no choice but to hand over. Although Bra gu ngom ngan was presented with the goddess, they never had carnal relations. Intimate contact between the two was limited to touching foreheads, a kind of greeting still used by the 'brog pa for kith and kin. One day gNam mtsho phyug mo, who appeared to Bra gu ngom ngan in the guise of a shepherdess, announced that in 10 months time on the full moon she would present him with a child. He very much looked forward to the appointed day, and was full of much pride and inflated ideas about himself. When the day arrived, Bra gu ngom ngan dressed up in full military regalia and went to the lake to receive his child. As he waited he spied a female 'brong licking its calf clean. Bra gu ngom ngan took his bow and let an arrow fly in their direction and with this one shot killed the baby 'brong. At this moment, the mother 'brong turned into gNam mtsho phyug mo and furiously denounced Bra gu ngom ngan for killing his own child.

Overcome with grief, he resolved to commit suicide by plunging into the icy lake, which he immediately did. Somehow he did not drown but was conveyed to the far side. Dazed but still alive he pulled himself out of the water. Still intent on taking his own life, he began climbing gNyan chen thang lha so that he could freeze to death. Mysteriously, he arrived near the summit and back down to the bottom of the mountain still alive. After this episode he started to think that he had overcome the Divine Dyad. This brought him more and more confidence and soon he returned home triumphant.

The legend of Bra gu ngom ngan encapsulates the theme of the A pa hor distancing themselves from the Dyad and their aboriginal religion. What is unclear is whether or not this marks the transition to early Bon or to Buddhism. If the Bra gu ngom ngan of the legend is the same figure who was a contemporary of Sangs rgyas yar byon, the tale

historically coincides with the transition to Buddhism. The moral of the tale is clear: humans are equal to or more powerful than the environment-based deities of the Divine Dyad. This is clearly the kind of message that Buddhism brought with it—that humanity, through the dharma, has the ability to transcend the world and worldly beings.

East of rTa mchog ngang pa do the sedimentary formations give way to granitic ones. Below Bra gu rta ra, on the opposite side of the Ra gzhung valley, is a rang byung bust of a white 'Dzam bha lha inside a small recess in the rock. Nearby, in another rock, is a black 'Dzam bha lha rang byung. Also in the vicinity is a flat boulder which is engraved with something so faint as to be unidentifiable. The local people call it mKha' 'gro rdo yig (the Writing in Stone of the Dakinis).

At the mouth of the Ra gzhung valley is a long narrow inlet bounded by g.Yang do to the west and sNying do to the east. On the north side of this inlet is bLa lnga sdings valley, a narrow valley with lush green pastures. At the mouth of the bLa lnga sdings valley a humble hermitage was founded in 1993 by two incarnate lamas, Shes rab bstan 'dzin and sGrup pa mthar phyin. The hermitage is called mGar chung dgon pa and consists of two small rooms. It is built on a hillside heavily covered in scrub juniper, with a natural spring; this is an ideal place for religious practice, with its trees, fresh water and medicinal plants. Up the valley from the hermitage is a dur khrod called mGar lung. A few kilometers up from mGar lung, and just before the valley widens into a marshy plain, is a hill named Nu ma ri (Breast Mountain). On the summit of Nu ma ri are the crumbling walls of an old hermitage destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. Prayer flags are draped over its decaying walls. It is best associated with a nun named Khyin chos who passed away about 30 years ago, and who was renowned in the area for her piety and ability.

Near the head of the valley is the gzhi ma La lnga sdings (Plain of the Five Summits) which is also called bLa lnga sdings (Plain of the Five Lamas), and the ruins of the monastery of the same name. Like every other precious religious monument at gNam mtsho, it was mindlessly razed to the ground by Red Guards. According to local information, La lnga sdings was built over a century ago. Kishen Singh halted one day east of Ngang pa do at a place he called Chogola or Langdang. Undoubtedly this is reference to La lnga sdings because "Langdang" is roughly how the name is pronounced in the A pa hor dialect, the first two syllables being phonetically combined and the final 'i' being pronounced like an 'a'. He reports that on a low-lying hill in the area there was a temple to the god "Chogola".

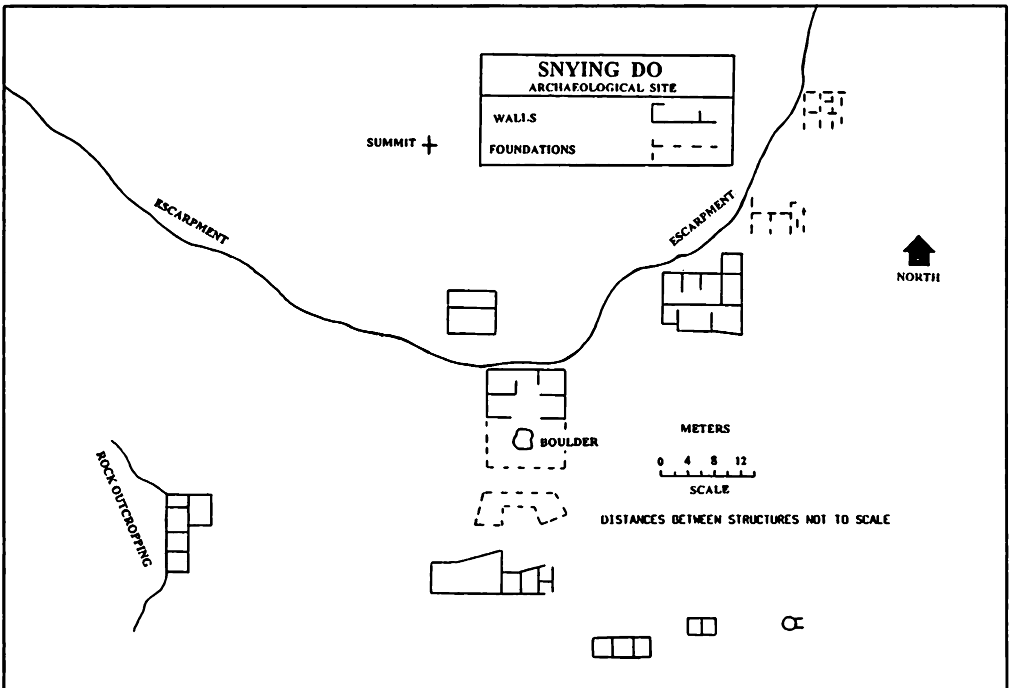
The mtsho skor trail east of mGar chung enters a valley parallel to gNam mtsho in order to avoid its jagged shoreline and long headlands. Several kilometers past mGar chung the mtsho skor lam crosses the Srag nyan la pass and enters a narrow vale which is home to the settlement of Srag nyan. Srag nyan consists of several small homesteads. The trail then traverses the La sbug la chen and descends to the largest winter pasture (dgun sa) and permanent settlements of the north shore of gNam mtsho. From mGar

chung all the way to the east side of gNam mtsho the mtsho skor lam more or less coincides with a motorable road used by the 'brog pa.

From mGar chung there is also a circuitous and more remote way around the headlands which is seldom used by pilgrims or the 'brog pa because it poor in pasturage and very rocky. This juniper-studded section of the lake shore is exceptionally important from a historical perspective nevertheless.

On the east side of the inlet at mGar chung, well off of the mtsho skor, is a cape with a hill near its end. This is sNying do (Heart Headland), the home of the most extensive ruins at gNam mtsho. The name itself hints at its erstwhile importance. sNying do has been virtually abandoned save for a few days of the year when the local herds are run through the area to graze on the scant grasses. At an indeterminate time in the past sNying do was the site of what local people say was the largest Bon center at gNam mtsho. Perhaps sNying do should be referred to as a gsas mkhar/sad mkhar rather than a dgon pa. Sad mkhar (literally citadel of deities) is the Zhang zhung generic name for sacred constructions, both large and small.

Natives are generally of the opinion that the ruins found here predate Gu ru rin po che's legendary visit to gNam mtsho in the 8th century. Until an in-depth archaeological survey of sNying do is carried out, there is little chance of conclusively dating and identifying it. A preliminary assessment garnered from a visual survey of the site is all that can be offered at this stage.



At the base of the rocky hill with the shrine (which is described in Chapter Three) are no less than 10 groups of scattered ruins. Taken as a whole, the site consisted of at least 50 rooms. sNying do may once have been a village rather than a single dgon pa. Against the hillside is what was once probably the largest structure at sNying do, its entrance facing south away from the hill that braces its north wall. It is aligned with cardinal directions, which must have had particular significance to its designers. Its original size is hard to determine, although walls as much as two meters tall and three-quarters-of-a-meter thick are intact. This is because the south half of it has been rebuilt, probably for use as a livestock pen. This can be seen in the poor and insubstantial construction of the walls, and in the haphazard distribution of orange climax lichen on the stones. Taken as a whole, the structure measures approximately 18 meters from north to south and 13 meters from east to west. Its south half has an open floor plan with a large boulder in the center, while its north half has four commodious partitions with a central courtyard or hallway. Its size causes it to look more like a monastic hall or some other kind of communal structure.

The other groups of ruins extend out form the largest structure for 100 meters to the west, north and east, and 50 meters to the south. To the east of the largest structure are several others built into the hillside, including one structure over 12 meters in length. The most westerly structure at sNying do was built into a rock outcrop and affords the best view of the ancient construction of the site. It evidently consisted of five rooms, three of which are about 10 square meters each inclusive of their outer walls. Of the remaining, two rooms one is larger and the other smaller than these three. The walls, now reduced to a maximum of 1.6 meters in height, are about one meter thick and are composed of two parallel courses of stones. In one of the three rooms of uniform size are two niches (bang khung) at ground level. For all but the largest rooms at sNying do, the trunks of the indigenous scrub juniper could have been utilized as rafters. Presumably, roofs were constructed much as they are today—of twigs and stones laid on top of the rafters and covered with layers of mud and wattle.

No such place as sNying do has yet surfaced in Bon literature which has made it extremely difficult to identify. However, it is not surprising that gNam mtsho was host to pre-Buddhist architecture as was Dang ra g.yu mtsho to an even greater extent. While the history of Zhang zhung is steeped in myth and legend, to the point of making the extrication of fact from these accounts very difficult, it nevertheless supplies some documentation. The *Old Tibet Chronicle*, composed around the time of Khri srong lde btsan, details the unification of central Tibet under King gNam ri slon btsan, and indicates that gNyan chen thang lha formed the border between sPu rgyal and Zhang zhung (Beckwith 1984: 213,237,238).[35]

In the *Old Tibet Chronicle* the Tibetans of sPu rgyal refer to themselves as the poor southern farmers and to the inhabitants of the Byang thang as the rich northern herders (Beckwith 1987: 8). Perhaps for centuries Zhang zhung and sPu rgyal had been rivals. In the 6th and 7th centuries, as the Yar lung kings expanded their kingdom across central

Tibet, alarm bells would surely have sounded in Zhang zhung as a threat to their territorial integrity was realized. As a strategic border area between the rival kingdoms, it is plausible that in this period the defenses of gNam mtsho were strengthened to respond to perceived threats from the south in this period.

This is not to say that Zhang zhung was not already a formidable military power on the plateau. Before the time of King Nam ri slon btsan, the powerful overlord of Ngas po (sKyi chu and sPhan po) was a vassal of the Lig myi dynasty of Zhang zhung (Beckwith 1987: 13,14). It appears that Zhang zhung, probably organized as a confederation, ruled over much of the plateau. For example, the overlordship of Zhang zhung is suggested in verses 50 to 54 of the *Old Tibet Chronicle* (Beckwith 1984: 236). The territorial vastness of Zhang zhung is consistently affirmed in Bon texts. For instance, in the well-known *Gangs ti se'i dkar chag*, Zhang zhung is said to have been divided into three parts: 1) outer (sgo), 2) middle (bar) and 3) inner (phug)(Norbu and Prats: 125). The outer part was subdivided into three parts and one of these subdivisions (g.yon sgo) was again subdivided into an inner zone (Ti se and Tsho ma pang), middle zone (rTa rgo and Dang ra g.yu mtsho), and outer zone (gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho phyug mo)(Norbu and Prats: 125). Placing the entire Byang thang into merely one subdivision of Zhang zhung is hyperbole, but it does communicate the extent of the temporal power it was premised to have.

A kingdom can only survive by guarding its frontiers, either as deterrent or defense against military incursions.[36] If for no other reason, gNam mtsho would have had fortifications and a military infrastructure. A military infrastructure at gNam mtsho would have enabled Zhang zhung to project its military and political power into the sPu rgyal kingdom.[37] The 18 forts of the frontiers of Zhang zhung are but one group of forts in Bon literature claimed to have been founded in the kingdom.[38] The building tradition in Zhang zhung extended to religious centers as well as forts. The most famous of these are the 37 'du gnas chen (holy places of assembly) established by Tibet's second King Mu khri btsan po for tantric practice (spyi spungs); these included sites at gNam mtsho, Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo rin po che (Karmay 1972: 40,41). According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, the inclusion of the Divine Dyads in the 37 'du gnas chen is a very crucial part of their history in Bon.

Furthermore, gNam mtsho is one of the sites at which the Thirteen Lineage Holders and Four Sages (Zhang zhung tantrists) are said to have practiced (Dagkar: Ms-A). Although sNying do cannot yet be positively identified according to the Bon tradition, one of four major monastic establishments associated with the Zhang zhung Vinaya lineages was founded at 'Dam shod snar mo (gNyan chen thang lha region)(Dagkar: Ms-A).

With the fall of Zhang zhung during the reign of King Srong btsan sgam po and its annexation by the Yar lung kingdom, the strategic and military importance of gNam mtsho may have increased, as a plateau-wide effort was launched to conquer lands further afield.[39] By the end of 677, Tibetan armies had captured the entire Tarim basin

and the lands to the southwest (Beckwith 1987: 43). Tibetans controlled the cities of the Tarim basin until the last Great Minister (sLob chen) dBa's kong zher was killed in battle in 866 (Beckwith 1984: 226). This two-century period of Tibet's Imperial ascendancy is documented in Tibetan forts that have been excavated in the Takla-makan desert (Snellgrove and Richardson: 31,32). The logistics and distances involved certainly meant that these forts had to be linked to a line of command extending across the entire Byang thang.[40]

Do khra, Sha do, Do ring and Points East

From the impressive ruins of sNying do the more demanding circumambulation of gNam mtsho, right along its shores, brings one to Do khra (Falcon Headland). The sTag lung pa lama Kong po dar shes spent 10 years here in one of the two caves (sTag lung chos 'byung: 298). One of the caves was carefully lined with a stone wall and shelves. From Do khra a cove must be circumvented in order to reach the next headland Sha do.

Sha do, now often translated as Meat Headland, was more likely known as Deer Headland (Sha ba do) in the past. In any event, the name of the headland is phonetically similar to Zhwa do, the island where the saint rGyal ba lo ras pa meditated. In fact, the islands of Chig do and gLang do, one of which is the Zhwa do in the saint's biography, are close to the modern-day Sha do. The confusion is compounded by some knowledgeable people maintaining that rGyal ba lo ras pa meditated on the Sha do headland. This implies that the names of the headlands have changed over the course of time, as is normal in Tibetan historical geography.

A highly remote location, Sha do is home to another of the so-called Bon po monasteries of gNam mtsho which are said to predate Buddhism. Like sNying do or sTong shong phug, Sha do is only known to a small group of people at gNam mtsho with good knowledge of local history and religious culture. So marginalized are these sites, geographically and economically, that awareness of them is highly limited. With the possible exception of a cave at Sha do, these sites have been invested with little historical and sacred geographical significance by the Buddhist inhabitants of gNam mtsho. While they are considered Buddhist territory, in that they were ritualistically handed to the religion by Gu ru rin po che, they fall outside the main topographical points of religious reference. Undoubtedly, poor pasturage at the headlands is a contributing factor to their present-day obscurity.

On a bench that directly overlooks the lake built into the side of the cliffs of the Sha do headland are three groups of ruins of disintegrating granite walls. The western group appears to be no more than eight meters long and is built into the escarpment. In situ boulders were incorporated into its construction—a sound building technique which persists today in the construction of homes and especially of monasteries. This structure was built in tiers and might have been several storeys tall. The uppermost room in the western group is only a little more than two meters square. Its upper wall is among the

most intact at Sha do and is adeptly built of stones as much as one meter in length and 30 centimeters thick. Some of the other walls at Sha do, as at sNying do, were partially rebuilt, ostensibly as livestock pens. The site is now completely abandoned and seldom visited.

The middle group of ruins, about 11 meters in length, is tucked into the escarpment. It is comprised of small interconnected rooms without corridors and has limited access to the outside. In what is left of its walls the skill of the masons is evident. The eastern largest group is about 13 meters long and is composed of small rooms four to six meters square. Its walls are one meter thick and now rarely exceed one meter in height. Unlike the other two groups of structures, this one apparently stood independent of the escarpment. Many of the stones used in construction at Sha do were neatly dressed and are flat and rectangular in shape.

Just east of Sha do is the longest headland at gNam mtsho, which is appropriately named Do ring (Long Headland). At the very tip of Do ring, which projects more than 10 kilometers into gNam mtsho opposite bKra shis do, is another small group of ruins which centers around two boulders 13 meters wide. A wall of flat, multicolored stones as much as 65 centimeters in length was built around the lower side of the two boulders. An entrance was built in it to the east. The wall attains its greatest height of around two meters at its western end and creates a passageway running between the interior of the structure and the two boulders. On the western boulder an inner wall was built to create an inner room or sanctum. The walls probably supported a roof at one time. The roof spanned no more than two-and-a-half meters, a length attained by fully mature scrub juniper trunks.

On a small boulder underneath the large one in the innermost chamber a Bon g.yung drung and the Bon mantra A Om' Hum' ra dza are outlined in black pigment.[41] The inscriptions are faint, and at least from the native perspective have the appearance of being self-formed. In order to reach the cave with the sacred writing, the full length of the outer passage must be traversed. The containment of the heart of the site by two layers of walls separating it from the outside is reminiscent of much of Tibetan sacred architecture, where there is limited access to the holiest portion of a structure. This is accomplished by the addition of galleries, vestibules and doorways. At Do ring we see the same principle at work in a rudimentary manner. To the east of the two main boulders is a much smaller one which has a worn mantra engraving on it. To the west and above the two core boulders of the site are what look like the foundations of other small

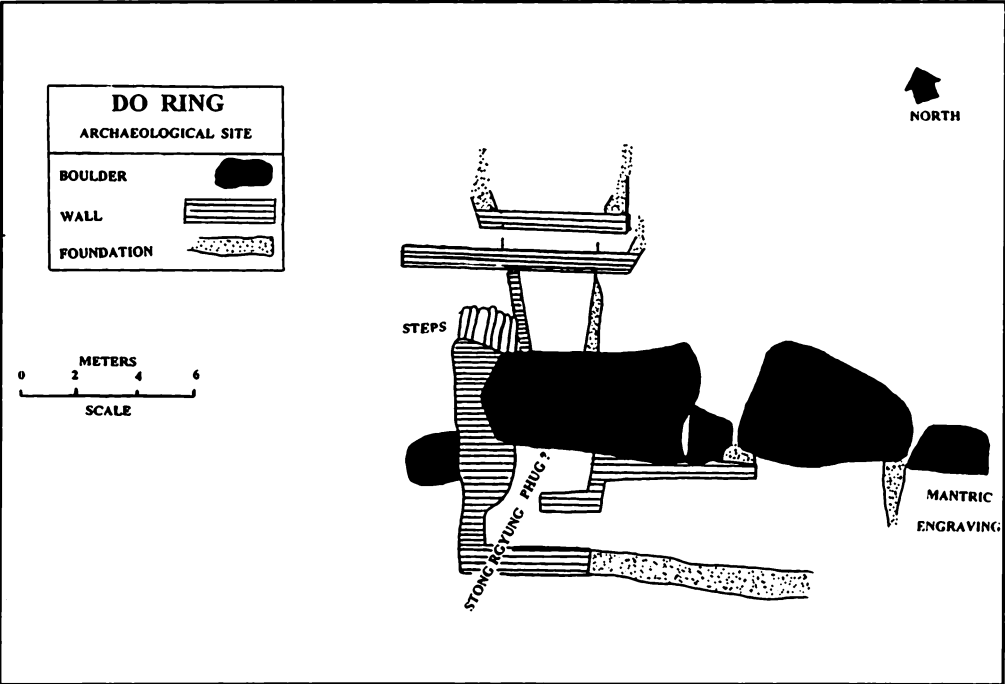


sTong rgyung mthu chen

buildings. It is clear that a shrine, hermitage or monastery existed here at one time. As the site is less structurally substantial than both Sha do or sNying do, it is generally overlooked by local historians. Do ring is not associated with Buddhism, the reason being that it is a famous Bon historical site. In the Bon tradition, gNam mtsho's Do ring is synonymous with the Zhang zhung tantric practitioner sTong rgyung mthu chen.[42]

At the eastern base of Do ring, in a broad valley ensconced between the lake and a range of hills to the north, the sinuous route around the headlands rejoins the mtsho skor lam. This valley of lush spring-fed meadows supports the settlements of La sbug and rDzab nag, which together form one of the largest 'brog pa habitations at gNam mtsho. The meadows and the protection the valley affords from bitter north winds are highly valued endowments, while the presence of naturally irrigated pastures make this valley an ideal base for the 'brog pa. These pastures or dgun sa (winter land) are fenced off and reserved for winter use, after the summer and autumn pastures have dried up and been burnt by frosts. The dgun sa not only support relatively luxuriant grasses but, because of the presence of ground water, do not freeze as quickly as the summer pastures (dbyar sa). Towards the end of the short summer in the Sixth Tibetan Month, the grasses are cut to be used as winter fodder during a one or two day festival.[43]

rDzab nag, with its very modest mud brick homes, is recorded in the annals of Victorian exploration. Dutreuil de Rhins, a French national and veteran explorer of the Congo and Central Asia, was deputed by the French government to explore Tibet, with gNam mtsho one of the objects of the mission.[44] On November 30, 1890, after approaching



from the north, the expedition had its first view of gNam mtsho. de Rhins described it as a "sacred and revered" lake. The expedition followed the north bank of the lake to rDzab nag (spelled: Zamna), where they were to remain for 50 days effectively under arrest. Their intention was to procure permission from Tibetan and Chinese authorities to visit Lhasa. Their seven weeks at rDzab nag were occupied in vainly arguing with the authorities. The first government delegates arrived from Lhasa 11 days after they had pitched camp at rDzab nag. By December 17th, 14 officials including the Vice Legate of the Chinese mission in Lhasa had come with 400 musketeers in tow. Rather than heading for the forbidden capital, Dutreuil de Rhins and his ill-fated expedition divided and went east and north. The only piece of lore recorded in the account of their explorations came from the Vice Legate, who told de Rhins that gNam mtsho was filled with monsters and that a local woman had recently been eaten by a bear.

Traditionally, the 'brog pa from west of Dug ri la belonged to the estate of the Panchen Lama, while the herders from the 'Dam brgya shog brgyad, who primarily visited the east and south shores of gNam mtsho during the growing season, belonged to the estate of Ser ba monastery. On the other hand, the shepherds who lived permanently on the northeast side of gNam mtsho were part of the estate of the Dalai Lama. These 'brog pa, the servants (mi ser) of the Dalai Lama, formed the bDag po tsho pa gcig, a politically distinct unit. In Communist Tibet, some of this old system of territorial organization was retained and elaborated upon while other parts of it were dismantled.[45]

The settlements of the northeast shore of gNam mtsho exhibit a high degree of kinship affinity. This consanguinity as defined by territory appears to be an unusual feature of 'brog pa land tenure patterns. While no systematic study of 'brog pa kinship structures has been made, it appears that dgun sa are not often organized along blood lines.[46] Each clan has an A pha'i lha or pho lha for protection, which is passed on from father to son or by conversion in the case of a man who joins a woman's household. These are often Buddhist deities such as Tha 'og chos rgyal chen po in the retinue of Yamantaka, or A phyi gshog grong, a 'Bri gung pa protector. Some of these were probably Bon protectors which were assimilated into Buddhism. Then there are the A pha'i lha, who still have strong connections with Bon, such as the rTa rgo mched bdun and Do ba'i lha byang phug brag btsan, but who have assumed a Buddhist identity for those who worship them. For example, in the sBel nag ru khag there are three families that claim rTa rgo rin po che as their clan deity. The three families are Hri cing, Tshe pag and Byang ru. Do ba'i lha byang btsan is the A pha'i lha of Bya do rin po che. This deity is believed to be in the circle of rTa rgo rin po che and to confer special protection from lightning.

The presence of rTa rgo rin po che and at least one member of his retinue at gNam mtsho as clan protectors raises a number of questions. Does this show that at some time in the past there were migrations into the area from rTa rgo, or is it evidence for the political and cultural superiority of the rTa rgo rin po che region in pre-Buddhist times?

The consorting of rTa rgo rin po che with gNam mtsho indicates that this mountain had a far-reaching influence over the region. This is supported by the fact that at Dang ra g.yu mtsho there are no such myths of Nyan chen thang lha mating with her. Also, no families at Dang ra g.yu mtsho were discovered who observed gNyan chen thang lha as a clan protector. Moreover, as we see in the next section of the book, Dang ra g.yu mtsho apparently played a larger role in Zhang zhung history than gNam mtsho.

Among the A pa hor[47] there is some confusion as to the difference between the pho lha and A pha'i lha/rus rgyud lha (clan deity). Strictly speaking, the former are generic protectors of humans inherited from one's paternal ancestors. The pho lha are related genetically as are all human beings On the other hand, rus rgyud lha are individual protectors of families and clans, or possibly maximal descent groups. The rus rgyud lha have identities and histories as distinctive as the clans they represent. The problem is that the names pho lha and rus rgyud lha are often used interchangeably. This seems in part to be due to the attenuation of the importance of clan deities in modern 'brog pa society. A systematic survey of 'brog pa lineage deities needs to be undertaken to ascertain the practical distinctions which exist between the pho lha, rus rgyud lha and other personal protectors.

There is one more important consideration in relation to the rus rgyud lha: its original status. Since the advent of Buddhism, the rus rgyud lha has been the protector of the clan, but in the pre-Buddhist period it seems to also have been the mythological ancestor of the clan. Totemic functions may also have been indicated. Evidence for this is scant but is supported by the lore and mythology of the Divine Dyads and the Tibetan royal genealogies. The 'brog pa ancestral spirits (mes lha, ma sangs, mtshun lha), which perhaps were corollaries of the rus rgyud lha, also beg investigation. The mes lha, of which gNyan chen thang lha is one, appear to be ancient tribal or regional ancestral deities and are thus more inclusive than the rus rgyud lha. Also, the mes lha are a moribund part of A pa hor culture, while the rus rgyud lha are still featured in contemporary Tibetan culture. As a result, the rus rgyud lha has been adapted to both modern Bon po and Buddhist beliefs while the mes lha has retained a primitive character. As a personal protector, the yi dam is a personal tutelary deity but, unlike the rus rgyud lha or pho lha, it is usually acquired and not inherited.

East of rDzab nag is the small valley and settlement of Nyi sbug, which is accessible by road along the shore of the lake or via the Nyi sbug la chen, a shorter route around the lake used by pilgrims. On the La sbug chung la is a rang byung image of rTa mgrin. Just east of Nyi sbug, with its five gzhi ma, is the smaller pass of Nyi sbug la chung. It is rumored that there are ruins of a pre-Buddhist site on the hills above Nyi sbug, but this has not been confirmed. After crossing the Nyi sbug la, one traverses a rocky uninhabited shelf past the northern bathing portal known as Pa'i lcags 'phrang khrus kyi sgo or, more commonly, lCang phang khrus sgo. This must be the place Kishen Singh called Thuigo Sumna (Kishen Singh: 136), thuigo being an imperfect transliteration of khrus

sgo. Here, on the lake side, is the khrus sgo shrine comprised of ma ni stones and a prayer flag mast. In line with it, but further from the shore, is a ma ni wall, some cairns, a pile of old clothes, other personal effects, and the horns of some domesticated animals. This is what remains of the khrus sgo, but at one time there was also a srid gcod bum pa connected with this pile of discarded articles. These objects constitute offerings which are designed to dispose gNam mtsho phyug mo favorably to her petitioners.

The shelf narrows east of lCang phang khrus sgo as it squeezes between the bank of gNam mtsho and a granite escarpment, the last formation on the north side of the lake, dMar yam. At dMar yam is a small hot spring that was noted by Bonvalot, the leader of the first European expedition to gNam mtsho in 1889 (Bonvalot: 35). Kishen Singh calls this hot spring "Chang Phang Chuja". He and his team were robbed here by a party of 60 bandits of all but their surveying instruments and some basic equipment (Kishen Singh: 136).[48]

From the lake-bound cliffs of dMar yam, the mtsho skor turns south and enters the much broader eastern side of gNam mtsho.[49] At the northeast corner of the lake, but much further from the shore than dMar yam, is another series of eye-catching cliffs named Has po ri gdong, which are envisioned as the feet of the goddess rDo rje phag mo. The site is marked by a prayer flag mast and cairns. The east side of gNam mtsho, the shortest of its four sides, is low-lying and marshy, and provides fairly good pasturage. During his return journey to Lhasa in 1922, Henry Hayden reported seeing primulas, edelweiss, purple vetch and forget-me-nots on this side of gNam mtsho (Hayden and Cosson: 179).

We have surveyed seven of the early Bon sites which have recently come to light at gNam mtsho. In summary these are: Do ring, Sha do, sNying do, Bra gu rta ra, rTa mchog ngang pa do, Lug do and sTong shong phug. Almost certainly, the Bon po maintained structures at Bya do and bKra shis do, and probably at Gur chung and Do skya, as well as Khro kong skhang ma ri and Srin mo do. The highly desirable and beautiful sites of the four main Buddhist monasteries at gNam mtsho would surely have appealed to the ancient residents of the lake shore. The presence of caves at bKra shis do, Bya do and Do skya would have only added to their desirability as building sites. At this time, we can speak of more than 12 sites at gNam mtsho which pre-date the final chapter in the Buddhist occupation of the lake; that is, from the 13th century back perhaps as far as the Stone Age.

End Notes:

1. gLing Ge sar rgyal po sites are found at various places across the Byang thang. According to 'brog pa legends, King Ge sar's rival bDud A khyung had a kingdom covering the present-day counties of dPal mgon, Shen rtsa, Nag chu and A mdo. In the 'brog pa version of the epic, the bla mtsho of bDud A khyung was dPa' mtsho in gNam ru. When he was slain by King Ge sar, the shoreline is said to have receded each time one of his nine heads was chopped off. For background on the Byang thang in the epic see Ma 1991, pp. 26-31. In far western Tibet, near the source of the Sutlej river, is a sacred spring called Chu mig mthong dkrol, which is said to have been created by tears of exhaustion shed by King Ge sar's horse after the long chase to slay the black yak demon (Bellezza 1993: 42).
2. The present Gur chung rin po che, Venerable bLos gros dpal 'byor bzang po, kindly agreed to be interviewed and provided much of the information in this account. During the Cultural Revolution all historical documents at the monastery were lost, which explains why its history is now so scant.
3. The information presented in this paragraph, unless otherwise noted, comes from *Bod ljongs nag chu sa khul gyi lo rgyus rig gnas chen*, vol. 7, hereafter abbreviated in the text as *Nag chu sa khul*, pp. 547,548. In 1642, the Qosot prince Gushri Khan invaded Tibet, killed the king of gTsang, removed the Karma pa, and installed the Fifth Dalai Lama as the head of the country. Gushri Khan died in 1655, but his successors maintained the title King of Tibet until 1720. For historical background on the Qosots, see Richardson 1962, pp. 41-45.
4. In 1717, the Dzungars successfully invaded Tibet, provoked by an argument over the rightful heir to the Sixth Dalai Lama. They looted holy sites around Lhasa, which turned the population against them. In 1720, the Dzungars were defeated by the Chinese. For a synopsis of the Dzungar invasion of Tibet, see Richardson 1962, pp. 45-51.
5. Traditionally, monastic assembly halls are measured by the number of pillars needed to support them. Halls of less than 10 pillars are considered small.
6. The gNam ru 'du khongs bcu gsum were the 13 traditional 'brog pa camps (tsho pa) of what is now dPal gon county. The 13 are: 1) gNam chen, 2) Ring pa, 3) Se ba, 4) lDzong nag, 5) lDzong ru, 6) dPal sbyin, 7) bDun phag, 8) Sog ru, 9) bShad sgra, 10) gNam chung, 11) sGo mang ru, 12) sGar sde ru, and 13) rDza srib. The first eight of these were part of a subdivision of gNam ru rDzong known as Lho byang gzhung tsho brgyad, the next four were part of the gSer tsho bzhi subdivision, and the final camp, rDza srib, was apparently only formed during emergencies. See Lha bu gyang 'brug and bLo bzang bstan pa, pp. 6,7.
7. For the history of gShen sger, especially its taxation history, see Srid chos bstan 'dzin and sKal bzang srid chod, pp. 147-161. The article gShen gyer ram tsho pa'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus is found in the 1992 edition of *Bod ljongs nag chu sa khul gyi lo rgyus rig gnas chen*, a 'brog pa cultural journal published annually by the Nag chu prefecture.
8. For a historical review of the Zhang zhung snyan brgyud tradition see, Norbu 1995, 217,218.
9. The information on Do skya dgon pa herein, unless otherwise noted, is derived from *Bod ljongs nag chu sa khul gyi lo rgyus rig gnas chen*, vol. 7, pp. 510-513.

10. The traditional liturgical calendar of sDo skya is as follows: in the First Tibetan Month, there is a one day Cho 'phrul dus mchod, a two-day Tara pooja, and three days of sMon lam. In the Second Tibetan Month, there are Vajrasattva (three days), a *Prajnaparamita* recital (two days), a bKa' 'gyur recital (seven days) and a Gu ru'i blo sgrub (Gu ru rin po che devotions, three days). On the Third Tibetan Month: Tshe sgrub (long life pooja, five days) and another bKa' 'gyur recital (seven days); the Fourth Tibetan Month: tshe sgrub (eight days) and a Thugs rje chen po ritual (seven days); the Fifth Tibetan Month: tshe sgrub (seven days) and a Fasting Ritual (four days); the Sixth Tibetan Month: Guru Yoga (one day); the Seventh Tibetan Month: a Thugs rje chen po (five days) and ritual for the Bar do deities (three days); the Eighth Tibetan Month: mKha' 'gro'i sgrub pa (propiation of dakinis, seven days); the Ninth Tibetan Month: Lha bab dus chen(one day) and a ritual for the Bar do deities (seven days); the Tenth Tibetan Month: Thugs rje chen po (five days), Vajrasattva (seven days) and Bar do deities (three days) observances; the Eleventh Tibetan Month: Dri med bshags rgyud (Confessional Buddha rituals, three days), Gu ru'i blo sgrub (three days) and Phur ba (eight days); and in the Twelfth Tibetan Month, a Medicine Buddha ritual (three days) and Gu ru drag po (five days). In addition to these ritual observances, a Gu ru rin po che pooja was held on the 10th day of each month, while two days of *Prajnaparamita* recitals were held on a monthly basis. In every calendar year there were 159 days of ritual activities on the monastic level.
11. Documentation of lCe do is found in the *Art of Tibetan Rock Paintings*, pp. 136-141. Photograph no. 164 shows the headland itself, and photo no. 165 the cave. Photos no. 166 to 170 depict cave paintings found on the right inner wall, and photos no. 171-173 are of paintings on the rear wall.
12. The six main ungulates of the Byang thang are: 1) Blue Sheep/*Pseudois nayaur* (rna); 2) Antelope/*Pantholops hodgsoni* (tshud); 3) Argali/*Ovis ammon hodgsoni* (gnyan); 4) Wild Yak/ *Bos grunniens* ('brong); 5) Wild Ass/ *Equus kiang* (rkyang); and 6) Gazelle/*Procapra piticaudata* (dgo ba). For zoological data on these animals, see Schaller.
13. Refer to the photographs in *Art of Tibetan Rock Paintings* for a pictorial reference of paintings at lCe do.
14. The sun is a symbol with universal appeal. In Eurasia and other parts of the world, it is the single most important symbol of life-giving and generative energies. For an exposition of the symbolism of the sun in Chinese, Indian and other civilizations, see *The Sun Symbol of Power and Life* compiled by Mandanjeet Singh. Its symbolism has evolved differently according to the particular cultural environment in which it developed. In the solar rock art of Central Asia, the sun has many forms, from circles and anthropomorphized versions to pictographs which signify light, heat and fire (Kimball and Martynov). At the Saimaly Tash site in the Tien shan mountains of Kyrgyztan, the symbolism of the sun can be traced from the simple circles of the Neolithic to the Bronze Age anthropomorphic representations (Kimball and Martynov). According to the 5th century B.C.E. Greek historian Herodotus, just below the revered goddess Tabiti in the Scythian pantheon was Papaeus, god of the sun and sky and

his wife Api, the earth goddess (Pavlinskaya: 34). The mythologem of the separation of the sky and earth is found around the world and is frequently associated with a sky-father and earth-mother.

Unfortunately, the prehistory and archaeology of the Byang thang is so rudimentary as to make a cross-cultural comparison of its solar rock art very difficult. We can only speak in generalities of the life-bestowing and protective function of the sun in the prehistoric Byang thang. Two petroglyphs which capture this solar symbolism are located at Tshwa kha and Shen chen (Suolang: no. 95,104). At Tshwa kha a crescent moon and sun rise above a 'brong as well as at other places on a boulder. At Shen chen we find a similar composition of a sun rising above a 'brong and another sun rising over an antelope. On the Byang thang the sun was inextricably connected with the 'brong and other animals of the hunting subsistence culture. This basic fact of existence is vividly portrayed in these petrogylphs, as it is in the paintings of lCe do. The central position of the swastika in the lCe do painting suggests that it links the moon and sun together through its cosmogonic symbolism. The centrality of the swastika, as mentioned previously, is also found in the cave painting at Lha mtsho lung pa, where the sun and moon and other symbols revolve around it. The deification of the sun and moon is documented in the 33 Dimensions of Non-human Beings (g.Yen khams sum cu tsa gsum), the classes of elemental spirits in the assimilated Bon tradition. The sun and moon and seven other types of beings belong to the bar (intermediate space), which is one of the three subdivisions of this classification(Norbu 1995: 252). In the Bon tradition there is a syncretic myth which explains the origins of the sun and moon. After sentient beings became habituated with non-virtuous conduct, they lost their intrinsic light. Out of compassion, Srid pa sangs po 'bum khri created the oceans from his tears, and the sun and moon sprang from them to provide illumination for the world. There are many synonyms for the word sun in the Tibetan language, including ones which by virtue of their vocabulary seem to be derived from pre-Buddhist culture. These include srid byed (maker of existence), srid pa'i sgron me (fire light of existence), nam mkha'i nor (jewel of the firmament), nam mkha'i mig (eye of the firmament), and khri can (throne-like/mind-like).

The sun in Tibetan folklore is commonly said to be made of fiery crystal and the moon of watery crystal. In Bon and Buddhist tantra, the moon symbolizes the male element, means (thabs), and the sun the female element, wisdom (shes rab). The two combined (nyi zla) are synonymous with the symbolism of ecstatic embrace (yab yum). Also in tantra, the sun and moon are tied up with the blood and semen (khu khrag) respectively, and are the physical basis for the red and white droplets of spiritual energy (thig le dkar dmar). The sun and moon in both Bon and Buddhism are highly auspicious symbols and are used to decorate gtor ma, as bases for deities to rest on, and as metaphors for philosophical concepts.

15. Khyung and eagles are found in petroglyphs at various sites on the Byang thang. One example found at mTha' kham pa depicts two birds flying head to head, their wings forming a diamond pattern (Suolang: no. 77). A horned variety of bird, like the classic Bon khyung, is shown hovering above an ungulate at the Shar tshang site (Suolang: no. 113). Religious

associations aside, the presence of the eagle in cave art is probably related to its legendary role as a hunting bird.

16. Information presented here on sPo che was primarily obtained from sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag.
17. Historical data on Bya ru mtsho came from sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag.
18. sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rna dag was born in 1926, in Khyung po dkar ru, to a humble family well known for their painting skills. In 1933, he entered the sTeng chen dgon pa and, in 1941, he came to g.Yung drung gling in gTsang province. In 1945, sLob dpon made a pilgrimage to Nepal and gained first-hand knowledge of its ancient Bon sites. From 1945 to 1950, he lived as a virtual hermit under the guidance of his master sGangs ru tshul khrims rgyal mtshan. It was during this part of his life that he lived near gNam mtsho. In 1950, he went to sMan ri gling to study and in 1953 received his lha rams pa degree. He then went on to teach at sMan ri until 1957. For two and a half years, between 1957 and 1960, sLob dpon lived at Se zhig monastery at the foot of the rTa rgo range. In 1960, while trying to escape to India, he was shot and captured by Chinese soldiers at Mu ra ri, on the north shore of bKra ri gnam mtsho. After nursing his injured leg back to health in an amazingly short time, he mounted another escape and this time was successful in his bid to reach India. From 1961 until 1964, he lived and worked in the United Kingdom with the Tibetologist David Snellgrove. In 1986 he established his own dgon pa in the Kathmandu valley, Khri brtan nor bu rtse. For further biographical information, see Tenzin Namdak, pp. 147-153.
19. Information on Phug pa dgon is mainly derived from *Bod ljongs nag chu sa khul gyi lo rgyus rig gnas chen* vol. 7, pp. 520-526.
20. The founder was reincarnated as Rig 'dzin zhang chung dbang mo, who was born in the Fire Rabbit Year in Khyung po sTeng chen dkar ru. He was a self-recognized sprul sku who discovered his monastery at the age of nine. He went into retreat for 13 years and then, amid many obstacles, re-established Phug pa dgon. At the age of 33 he travelled to rKong po Bon ri for a three-year retreat (in fact, he spent much of his life in retreat). After his death at age 68 there was a long gap before the Phug pa dgon found new leadership under the lama Li shu'i yang sprul nang do mtsho chen, who left various zhabs rjes on the site.

    The second reincarnation finally appeared in the person of Grup chen bstan 'dzin 'od zer rgyal mtshan, who spent a total of 19 years in retreat. He built structures, including the sGrub khang dmar po shrine to the bar do deities, and installed images. It was during this time that the monastery became a branch of g.Yung drung gling in gTsang province. For the first half of Grub chen btsan 'dzin's life he practiced Zhi rgyas dbang drag, a tantric practice involving his tutelary deity (yi dam). He also harnessed the power of a gzhi bdag and other natural forces. Grup chen bstan 'dzin 'od zer rgyal mtshan espoused a nonsectarian view and stressed monastic discipline. After a highly productive life he died at the age of 84.

    The fourth in the Phug pa dgon lineage was Grub chen rtogs ldan dmar po, who was born near the monastery in the Earth Rabbit Year. He built an assembly hall of eight pillars, a bla brang, and several other chapels and structures. He died at the age of 80. The fifth in

the lineage was Shes rab bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan who was born in 1915 in the Earth Rabbit Year. He was enthroned at the age of five. He enlarged the monastery, added a gilt roof and built his own bla brang. He is especially remembered for binding a local deity called Byang btsan. In commemoration, the sMan ri mKhan chen (the head of the Bon po) erected a black flag. The deity thus became a Bon protector and was propitiated as such. In return for this great service, the monastery's taxes were halved. In 1945, Phug pa dgon was opened as a major Bon pilgrimage area, and in that year. Also in 1945 the monastery hosted a substantial religious ceremony called bDud rtsi 'bum sgrub. By this time the monastery had become fairly prosperous and influential.

It was at the time of the bDud rtsi 'bum sgrub that sLob dpon bstan 'dzin rnam dag received teachings at the monastery from Shes rab bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan.

21. The local legend of sTong shong phug was shared by Bya do rin po che and the Venerable sKal bzang rgyal mtshan, the phyag mdzod of Bya do dgon pa.
22. The ancient identity of sTong shong phug can be no other. Over the centuries of local oral history, the archaic and particularly the Bon dGu khri part of the name was lost, and the remaining portion of the name was altered in meaning to assume more everyday connotations. When the Bon po disappeared from the region, there was little motivation to retain the original significance of the name which was allied with the Bon religion. The number nine (dgu) has distinct Bon connotations and is the most important number in the Bon cosmogonies. Probably as a result of its cosmogonic connotations dgu has come to signify 'many' or 'all' in the Tibetan language. As we have seen, Bon is replete with enneads of deities and nonary doctrinal systems. In ancient China, the number nine signified sky, heaven and the divine (Birrel: 28, 306) which is not unlike its Bon connotations. The word khri in the Zhang zhung language has the import of mind, life and longevity and was an important part of the title of the Yar lung kings (Norbu 1995: 23,24). The words stong (1,000) and shong (mountain ridge) in their original context might have referred to 1,000 mountains as a symbol of unrivalled power and strength. Nine Khri and 1,000 mountains together seem to communicate a cosmological or doctrinal completeness. Such a meaning would conform with our understanding of early Bon tenets.
23. Historical data on Bya do monastery and a description of the sacred geography of the site were obtained from Bya do rin po che and the Venerable sKal bzang rgyal mtshan. In the Cultural Revolution, the history of the monastery was all but lost, save for the attempts of these two gentlemen to recover what they could from their memories. Bya do rin po che has supplemented this effort by interviewing Tibetans with first-hand knowledge of Bya do dgon pa. Data on the sacred geography of the site also came from the article written by rTse sprul thub bstan rgyal mtshan (as noted in the text) and from local sources.
24. Bya do rin po che, named bsTan 'dzin 'byung gnas chen, was born in 1954 in the 'brog pa settlement of mGo sbug. He lived at Bya do dgon pa for a full year before fleeing across the Himalaya to a life in exile. He first stayed in Nepal before moving to Bodh Gaya and Varanasi. He then resided at Dalhousie from 1963 to 1973, before moving to the relocated Ser ba dgon

pa in south India. In 1986, he was able to spend three days at Bya do dgon pa during his visit to Tibet. In 1990, he was awarded his dGe bshes lha rams pa degree, and in 1991 he became a teacher of philosophy and dialectics at rNam rgyal grwa tshang in Dharamsala. Bya do rin po che is fluent in the Mongolian language and taught in Mongolia in 1992 and 1994. In March 1997, he was appointed the abbot of rNam rgyal grwa tshang.

25. This information was obtained from the leader of the Khams pa band that sought refuge at Bya do, Nam mkha'i rdo rje, a mirthful sngags pa now in his late 70s. Currently, Nam mkha'i rdo rje lives in Kathmandu at the dPal karma'i chos 'khor theg chen legs bshad gling monastery.
26. The highlights of the Bya do liturgical calendar included monthly Hayagriva poojas (rTa mgrin yang gsang and rTa mgrin zor brgya) and a bigger Hayagriva ritual (Tshogs bskong) held thrice a year. Once a year, a large Vajrakilaya pooja was held in the bla brang. During the First Tibetan Month, from the first to the third day, there was a dPal ldan lha mo pooja, and from the eighth to the 16th day, sMon lam chen mo. In the Second Month, a Yogatantra sand mandala was constructed, together with printed mandalas of sMan lha. In the Third Month, from the eighth to the 16th day, a Yamantaka sand mandala was made and consecrated. In the Fourth Month, a complete reading of the bKa' 'gyur was staged and in the Fifth Month, the rNam rgyal stong mchod was observed. In the Sixth Month, from the first to the tenth day, monks went to the Bying lung bKa' 'gyur lha khang located 50 kilometers to the north, for a recital of the Canon. This ceremony was sponsored by the 'brog pa of the region. In the Seventh Month, a bDe mchog mandala was made. On the 22nd day of the Ninth Month a rNam rgyal stong mchod was held, and on the 25th day of the Tenth Month, 1,000 prayers to Tsong kha pa were recited. In the Eleventh Month, from the 27th to 29th day, there was a Tara pooja. From the 22nd to 29th day of the Twelfth Month, the dGu gtor exorcism was held.
27. rGod tshang mgon po rdo rje, better known as rGod tshang pa, was born in 1189. In his childhood he was known for his handsome appearance, good singing voice, and his gentle nature which attracted people to him. He mastered several texts after only hearing them once. He travelled to Rwa lung where he met Dharmavamin rGya ras, became his disciple, and received various tantric sadhanas and initiations from him. At his ordination, he was given the name mGon po rdo rje. 'Bri gung pa also bestowed instructions and hidden teachings on him. rGod tshang pa travelled widely. He made pilgrimages to Mount Kailas, Kashmir and Jalandhara in Punjab/Himachal Pradesh. He lived at rGod tshang, Tswa ri, Yang dkar, Khyung dkar, Lha khab, sTeng ro, dGa' ldan and rDo rje gling, among other places. Before passing into Nirvana, he instructed his followers to spend at least a year in seclusion, not to erect images and not to collect dues. See Roerich 1976, pp. 680-688.
28. A resume of archaeological sites at gNam mtsho was published by the author. See Bellezza 1996.
29. Since George Roerich collected metallic objects at graves and megalithic sites on the Byang thang 70 years ago which he thought dated back to the Bronze Age, very little headway on

this chapter in Tibetan prehistory has been made. As so little is known about the distinctions between the Bronze Age and Iron Age in Tibet, some specialists prefer to link them together in what they call the Metal Age. The chronology of the Metal Age in Tibet is uncertain but it appears to range from the second millennium B.C.E. to the 6th century. At this time, a general survey of Metal Age sites as presented in Chinese publications does little to elucidate 2,000 years of Tibetan prehistory. The evidence for Chacolithic central and western Tibet offers few points of reference to delineate it chronologically from the Stone Age on one hand, and the Historical period on the other. The situation is very different in the provinces of Qinghai and Gansu, where dated sequences have emerged. However, links between these areas and central Tibet are vague at this time. See Chayet pp. 55,56,60. Metal Age objects which evidently originate in Tibet and have been tentatively dated include a bronze dagger found in Nang chen, dated 800 to 500 B.C.E., a bronze mirror found in rKong po dated 800 to 300 B.C.E., and another bronze mirror allegedly found in the upper gTsang po valley dated 800 to 300 B.C.E. (Ronge: 407-410). In tombs which date from what Chinese archaeologists call the pre-Imperial Tubod period, both iron and bronze articles have been discovered (Hu xue tru). The largest source of Tibetan Metal Age artifacts is undoubtedly the amulets and fetishes called thog lcags. The author has personally examined many of them and has identified typologies that date to prehistoric Tibet and adjoining countries. Unfortunately, while thog lcags of all kinds are popular among collectors of Tibetan antiquities, little scholarly information is available on this complex assortment of bronze and meteoric articles. As thog lcags have been used and worn for centuries by Tibetan people, they are seldom found in situ. Historical lore attached to them is also scarce because Tibetans summarily consider them rang byung and have thus disconnected them from their cultural origins. In China, the Bronze Age is dated 2200 B.C.E. to 500 B.C.E. and is characterized mainly by weaponry and sophisticated ceremonial vessels which indicate that ancestor worship was the primary form of religion (K.C. Chang 1983: 362,364).

30. As early as the Aeneolithic Afanasyevskaya culture (end of 3rd millennium B.C.E.) in southern Siberia, tombs that consisted of circular enclosures three to 12 meters in diameter are known, often made of small stones. Superstructures are also found in the tombs of the Bronze Age Okunev and Andronovo cultures of Central Asia. See Gryaznov for a review of these cultural groups, pp. 46-53, 89-93. It is theorized that the Aeneolithic Afanasyevskaya culture was an Indo-European group, as evidenced by the style of their burials and their lithic and ceramic remains. The Andronovo, probably a series of local cultural groups of Indo-Iranian identity, may have been related to the prehistoric Tocharians. The stock-breeding Andronovo extended in the southeast as far as the Pamirs of Tadjikistan. For an overview of prehistoric Indo-European migrations and settlement patterns in north and Central Asia, see Mallory, pp. 56-63,145-147,223-230.

31. In the culture of the 'brog pa circular structures are rich in symbolism. For example, the tent site or nang ra (home enclosure) of the gzhi ma is usually conceived of as round although it may only have rounded corners. This is true despite the tent itself being square or rectangular in shape. Some are built as much as 1.6 meters into the ground on the side opposite the

entrance and have been continually occupied for generations. Like the tent fabric and the poles, the nang ra has great symbolic value. Disused nang ra, some centuries old, dot the Byang thang. They are either abandoned or rebuilt for a variety of reasons. A few are round in shape while most are oblong or square.

In the mythology of the 'brog pa, the nang ra represents a microcosm of the intermediate realm of the universe. The surface of the nang ra—its living and working space—can be equated with the intermediate realm, the sphere of human existence. It is divided into two halves lengthwise, the right half (if one is facing inwards from the entrance) being the pho'i sa khul (father's domain), and the left half, the mo'i sa khul (mother's domain). Like the universe, as typified by the Divine Dyads or by man and woman, there are two distinct zones in the nang ra, each with its own character and function. Traditionally, allowing for the terrain, the entrance of the nang ra is built facing east, towards the rising sun which illuminates the altar (chos khang) on the opposite wall. The two halves of the nang ra are joined by the hearth (thab kha), the center of family life and the middle of the microcosmic nang ra. The hearth has three stones which in ancient mythology were apparently a recapitulation of the tripartite universe and symbolized its potential mastery. While the thab lha (hearth deity), a dgra lha, survives in contemporary 'brog pa culture, little of this pre-Buddhist cosmological symbolism does. However, in Lahoul (Lho yul) in the Great Western Himalaya the symbolism of the hearth stones is intact according to Tshe ring rDo rje, the foremost native scholar of the region. The three hearth stones in Lahoul are: 1) steng gi lha—white, 2) bar gyi btsan—red and 3) 'og gi klu—black.

On the Byang thang, the klu are thought to rule over the mar sgam, a recess in the female side of the foundation of the nang ra which is used for the storage of butter. An ancient custom, which seems to be on the verge of extinction, is the construction of a secret vault called a gter sgam or nang rten in the west wall near the chos khang, where special offerings for the klu are placed in a vase (klu bum). The klu residing here is a family protector who watches over the well-being of both people and livestock. Hence we see that the base of the nang ra symbolizes the intermediate realm and the subterranean niches the underworld dimension. The srid gsum, in turn, are recapitulated in the tent poles and hearth stones, which serve as symbolic bridges that unify the three realms of the universe. It is this bridging function, born of the urge to occupy the harmonious center of the universe, that principally explains the origins of the ritual and mythical importance of the hearth and poles. The symbolism of the nang ra was collected during a number of expeditions to the Byang thang over the last 10 years. It appears more prevalent in the central and western Byang thang than the eastern Byang thang. Nevertheless, this is not well articulated suggesting that it is a moribund part of 'brog pa culture.

The cosmological importance of the nang ra at the Divine Dyads and at other places in the Byang thang has cultural parallels. For example, among many of the people of the Altai and Siberia the tent symbolizes the world (cf. Haarh: 141). It is this cosmology of the tent that forms one of the most important mythological links between the 'brog pa and the people of north and Central Asia. In 1933, Professor Tucci observed a festival in the village of sPu in

Khu nu, Himachal Pradesh, called sGra lang (Tucci 1966: 61-70). The focus of the festival was a circular enclosure called a dog ra, which functioned as a magical projection of the universe. In the center of the dog ra was a stone pillar (which is still there) that represents the axis mundi or center of the universe. The deity of the dog ra was dog lha, the god of the region who became the god of the universe. The dog lha invited dog mo, a deity related to A phyi gung rgyal ma to the dog ra, to participate in the celebration. The songs sung at the festival had betrothal, fertility and happiness as their themes and, according to Tucci, alluded to an ancient society of hunting and ancestral worship.

32. The confusion of rTa mchog and rTa chog is repeated at rTa mchog kha 'bab, the sacred source of the Brahmaputra river, which issues from the Bye ma'i g.yung drung glacier, squeezed between two triangular mountains called rTa chog. The other similarity between these two holy sites is that they both have a 'Bon po dgon pa', both of which are said to be very sacred and ancient. The rTa mchog Bon po dgon pa and the exploration of the four river sources in the Mount Kailas region were the subject of an article by the author. See Bellezza 1993.
33. The discovery of rTa mchog dgon pa and other archaeological sites at gNam mtsho was documented in an article by the author. See Bellezza 1996.
34. We know that the horse is, and was, a potent symbol in Tibetan mythology. According to a gter ma text *Byams ma*, one of the twelve rGyu bon scholars (Shes pa can bcu gnyiṣ) who lived during the time of King gNya khri btsan po practiced a kind of Bon called rTa bon that consisting of rites designed to remove curses (Norbu 1989: 18). A plethora of deities, especially pre-Buddhist deities, are mounted on horses; klu, dmu, btsan, dgra lha, bdud and dregs pa (cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 13,14). There are also a number of deities with horse heads. The divine horse of King Ge sar is instrumental in his victory. The rol bzhangs rta rgyan can (beautiful musical instrument with equine ornaments) figured into early Bon royal funerals (Lalou: 14). Perhaps the most important ancient symbolism of the horse is the rlung rta, the mythical creature who carries prayers and acts as an agent for the salubrious rlung rta force.

    Ever since the horse was introduced on the Byang thang it has been an extremely valuable component of the pastoral and hunting economy. The wide open plains of the Byang thang are truly horse country. So important was the horse that the Yar lung kings captured the kingdoms of 'A zha and Sum pa at least in part because of their superior breed of horses. The horse in pre-Buddhist times was also probably estimable as a clan and ancestral symbol. In eastern Khams there is a group of Khams pa known as the White Horse tribe, who have retained a portion of this ancient symbolism. Among the Ch'iang tribes, one of the clan ancestors is a white horse called Maoniu and, in Tangut folklore, Gine, the son of Rato and progenitor of the tribe, appeared as a horse (Kychanov).
35. A translation of the *Old Tibet Chronicle* and a study of its contents was made by Professor Beckwith. See Beckwith 1984, pp. 177-269.
36. These military centers were in all likelihood connected with the civil and cultural organization of gNam mtsho. In Imperial Tibet, there seemingly was no distinction between military and

civil organization: for instance, the term sde refers to both a district and regiment (Snellgrove and Richardson: 31,32). In fact, the military organizational skill of Tibet might be as old as the community system itself (Ronge: 407). The ru khag and ru ba—terms which define community structures in Tibet—were, in the Imperial period, applied to nomadic regiments (Ronge: 407; Lha bu g.yang 'brug and bLo bzang bstan pa: 5). Zhang zhung was dominated by a martial society as well, reflected in the hegemony it exerted over the war-like southern Tibet.

According to Bon historical records, the temporal power of Zhang zhung was centered at its capital at Khyung lung dngul mkhar in far western Tibet, while another 18 lesser castles were built for subduing its frontiers. At each of these 18 castles were major settlements, Bon high priests (Bon chen) and great gods (gsas chen)(Ramble: 91). From this information we may expect that places like sNying do served a wide range of functions in both the military and civil spheres. The site could well have integrated a fort, temple, habitations and other structures within itself, and thus functioned as a whole community. For a list of the names of the 18 frontier castles of Zhang zhung, see Ramble, p. 92. The locations of most of them have not yet been determined.

37. There are several references to the army of Zhang zhung which attest to its strength and importance. For example, when King Srong btsan sgam po was slighted by the Chinese as he sought a bride from among them, as retribution he launched an attack against the 'A zha in 637 or 638 with an army that was reinforced with Zhang zhung troops. In the mid-7th century, Minister mGar stong rtsan collected an army in Zhang zhung and, allied with Kashgar and rKong yul, defeated the Chinese under General Su Hai-Cheng. Led by the minister mGar btsan snga ldom bu in 675 and 676, troops from Zhang zhung helped to ensure a Tibetan victory in Turkestan. According to the *Old Tibet Annal*, after the death of King Khri mang slon (Mang srog mang btsan) in 677, the people of Zhang zhung revolted. For these references to the Zhang zhung army, see Beckwith 1987, pp. 22,29,42,43. By 733, a fourth wing/horn (ru lag) was added to the existing three wings of the Tibetan army, composed of troops from western Tibet (Snellgrove and Richardson: 31,32).

38. In the text *'Bel gtam lung snying*, a tradition of four forts in the center of Zhang zhung and four forts (one in each of the cardinal directions) is cited, and in the *Zhang zhung ju thig* nine forts owned by nine kings are mentioned. In the *rGyal po'i bka'i thang yig*, the tradition of building forts goes back to the King gNya' khri btsan po with the founding of Sham po dgu brtsegs, and was continued by his various successors (Haarh: 99). For a list of the four forts in the center of Zhang zhung and the four forts on the cardinal directions, see *'Bel gtam lung snying* (p. 36), and for an enumerated reference to the nine forts of nine kings found in *Zhang zhung Ju thig*, see Dagkar: Ms-C.

According to the elusive *Lo rgyus chen mo* by Khu ston brton 'gros g.yung drung, Thang lha yar bzhur was the site of two forts at Dam and Zwa as well as for the sGro and rMa clans (Karmay 1996:72). The Zwa fort may possibly refer to Sha do/Zhwa do, an ancient Bon site at gNam mtsho. The *Old Tibet Chronicle* states that King gNam ri slon btsan led a 10,000-

strong army against the king of Ngas po (an area which includes the south side of gNyan chen thang lha), Zing po rje stag skya ba (whose main propitiation deity was Thang lha ya bzhur)(Karmay 1996: 63). This account indicates the kind of military infrastructure that existed around gNyan chen thang lha in the early 7th century. The Tun-huang manuscripts also record that the ruler of 'O yul Zing po rje stag skya bo had his capital at Nyen kar rnying pa (Richardson, 1971). The most likely name for the capital is gNyan dkar\mkhar rgying pal, which refers either to gNyan chen thang lha or a place in its vicinity.

39. In the 6th and 7th centuries, Central Asia experienced an economic resurgence and became a hub of Eurasian intellectual, economic and political life. By 663, the Tibetans held A zha, and 10 years later the entire Tarim basin (Beckwith: 1987 30, 43). In the west, Tibetan influence extended to the Arab-controlled states of west Central Asia and in the south reached as far as the plains of India (Snellgrove and Richardson: 32,49). It was at this time that Imperial Tibet would have become acquainted with Indian Buddhists, Persians and the Hellenized satrapies of Bactria and Sogdiana, and the rich and cosmopolitan cultural life of Central Asia (Snellgrove and Richardson: 49).
40. At the beginning of the 20th century, the renowned archaeologist Aurel Stein discovered a Tibetan garrison abandoned no later than 860. This garrison was situated at Miran, a strategically important location on the route along the oases of the southern margin of the Tarim basin between China and Turkestan. Moreover, Miran straddled two direct routes across the K'un-lun mountains to central Tibet. One thousand fragments of documents written on paper or wood in Tibetan were uncovered in the garrison, which primarily dealt with military matters. The stronghold consisted of rooms and "half-underground hovels" built of irregularly thin mud walls and coarse masonry. The design and construction were crude and the layout reminded Stein of a "rabbit warren". Many of the small rooms on the north side had no entrances and Stein hypothesized that they were accessed from above. Huge amounts of rubbish and debris were excavated including clothing, arms and implements, all of which were modestly constructed and well-worn. They included red and brown coarse woolen cloth, reed arrows and iron arrowheads, woven rugs, a sling of goat hair, woven rugs, felt items, combs of wood and horn, a quilted shoe with geometric design, a small bag of silk brocade and lacquered pieces of leather from armor. See Stein vol. 1, pp. 436-452.
41. This is a Bon dharani in which each of the symbols represents the five human attributes in their purified condition. It is recited as a prelude to certain sadhanas in preparation for more immersed forms of meditation. Mantras like this are generally believed to have originated in the Indian tradition and were imported to Tibet with Buddhism. However, Bon scholars are of the opinion that they were used in the Zhang zhung period.
42. sTong rgyung mthu chen was bequeathed the Bon teachings by sPe bon thog rtse and, with the help of mTsho sman rgyal mo, practiced them at gNam mtsho do ring and achieved great realization. sTong rgyung mthu chen in turn transmitted the teachings to Sad ne ga'u (Dagkar: Ms-A). He is said to have liberated nocent spirits and enemies by casting mustard seeds and gold dust. Due to his unimaginable supernatural powers, he lived on meditational

food, made five kinds of deities emanate from his body, and carried gNam mtsho in the lap of his robe, among other feats. sTong rgyung mthu chen passed the mantle of teachings on to Sha ri dbu chen, lCe tsha mkhar bu chung and lDe bon gyim tsha. While he was meditating at gNam mtsho he was invited by sPu lde gung rgyal to help the Bon religion. At Bye ma g.yung drung, on the military frontier between Zhang zhung and Tibet, he expounded 10,000 Bon texts to his disciple Sha ri dbu chen and the two of them translated a great wealth of Bon texts from the sMar language of outer Zhang zhung into Tibetan. The most important Bon cosmological work *Srid pa'i mdzod phug* was translated from the Zhang zhung language into Tibetan by these two scholars at g.Yung drung chu mig brgyad cu rtsa gnyis, and rediscovered by gShen chen klu dga' in 1017.

Hagiographic embellishments aside, sTong rgyung mthu chen was a key figure in Zhang zhung history, particularly at gNam mtsho. Unfortunately, because of the Tibetan tendency to mix the ordinary with the supernatural, and owing to a lack of corroborating sources, it is extremely difficult to establish when sTong rgyung mthu chen lived. The only thing that can be safely stated is that he was a pivotal figure in early Bon at gNam mtsho. As tempting as it is to make a correlation, there is no proof that the ruins at Do ring had anything directly to do with sTong rgyung mthu chen. Due to the notoriety of Do ring, the Bon po could have built and rebuilt structures here for centuries. According to the Bon scholar Lama Nyi zla tshe dbang, Do ring is also associated with the well-known Bon po personalities Rig pa rang shar and sNang bzher lod po, both of whom lived around the time of sTong rgyung mthu chen. In the Zhang zhung tantric sPyi spungs, there are the Thirteen Lineage Holders and Four Scholars of which sTong rgyung mthu chen was one. Its members are associated with both gNam mtsho and Dang ra g.yu mtsho. Owing to the abolition of Bon circa 787, the famous Bon lama Dran pa nam mkha' and the 'Nine Magicians' classified all the Bon texts and hid them in various groups, including in front of Pha bong ru rtse and Senge Kha yel at gNam mtsho (Karmay 1972: 93-97). The locations of these Bon sites at gNam mtsho has not been established. They are part of a lost chapter in the ancient history of gNam mtsho. See the *Treasury of Good Sayings*, Karmay 1972, pp. 27,48,49; Karmay 1975, p. 191.

43. For a description of migratory patterns and 'brog pa economic life, see Goldstein and Beall.
44. For the account of the ill-fated de Rhins expedition at gNam mtsho, see Grenard, pp. 61-96.
45. The bDag po tsho pa gcig, for instance, has been divided into 11 camps called ru khag which fall under the jurisdiction of gNam mtsho township (shang). Also under the jurisdiction of gNam mtsho shang, but further afield in the enormous basin that spreads east from the lake all the way to the flanks of bSam gtan gangs bzang, are two other confederated groups, the Se sde and Ko khrab, which now comprise five and eight ru khag respectively. Ko khrab, which is now known as Bya dkar, originally belonged to the 'Dam brgya shog brgyad. Traditionally, the ru khag in the area were known by their geographical or clan names, but the 24 camps in the reorganized Communist system are simply referred to by number. There are currently five ru khag in the vales of the northeast half of the lake. These are divided into residential units, which are further divided into individual households or gzhi ma. For

example, the ru khag of sBel nag (which is accessible from rDzab nag via a small pass called Byas tshang la) is divided into four residential units scattered over a fairly wide area. sBel nag proper consists of seven gzhi ma, sBel nag bar las of eight gzhi ma, Chu mig phug kha of four gzhi ma and sBel nag nab bzhug of three gzhi ma. In total, the sBel nag ru khag has 22 gzhi ma. According to Communist officials in the 'Dam gzhung county government, the ru khag of gNam mtsho township average between 20 and 30 gzhi ma. This administrative accounting of every single household is supposed to extend to all corners of the Byang thang and owes much of its organizational efficiency to the system already in place when the Chinese took over. The origins of an administrative system characterized by the close monitoring of human resources can be traced back to the pre-Imperial period. As early as the 6th century, the law in Tibet required all men between the ages of 18 and 60 to report with their horses and weapons to the war department (Ronge: 406,407).

46. Although a detailed treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of this study, we will review the kinship affiliations of one ru khag which more or less reflects those of the surrounding camps. In the sBel nag ru khag, 16 of its 22 households share an enatic relationship (mo tshan). Intermarriage between these households is strictly prohibited. Due to a lack of data, it was not determined whether this pattern of ancestry and matrilocality is indicative of an ancient matrilineal clan system. At least since the spread of lamaist religion, households have been organized into patrilineal clans. It is unknown how this structure of patrilineal clans combined with the high level of matrilocality found in the sBel nag ru khag developed.

47. For the past few centuries, the terms Hor pa and A pa hor have been used synonymously. The conventional wisdom today is that they are one and the same thing. Nonetheless, the literal meaning of the two terms is very different. A pa hor (also spelled A pha hor) literally means father of the Hor or, in the native Byang thang dialect, big brother (or senior family member) of the Hor, and does not necessarily refer to the Hor pa themselves. There appears to be historical justification for this. At the time of the Hor pa invasions, beginning in the 13th century, the ethnic complexion of the Byang thang was altered through intermarriage and assimilation. It was at this time of great ethnic change on the Byang thang, that the term A pa hor may have been coined to differentiate the groups. Although successive waves of Hor pa invaders were thoroughly assimilated into the pre-existing Byang thang cultural milieu over the centuries, consistent differences in the clan deities of the two groups may have survived. Another alternative spelling is A pa'i hor, A pa'i being a term of respect similar to 'sir'.

48. In the 1940s, sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag had interaction with the bands of brigands who roamed the Byang thang. They ranged from bloodthirsty miscreants to decent people who had taken to this way of life for legitimate reasons. For example, some were reduced to banditry after having been dispossessed of their land and livestock; others had lost internecine feuds and still others found themselves caught between warring parties. sLob dpon adds that a pilgrim or mendicant on foot would generally not be molested, and in fact would

often be shown hospitality. Unsettled political conditions and the bellicosity of various 'brog pa clans created a situation where brigandage was endemic. The former chief (srid dpon po) of A mdo rdzong Nor bzang reports that, in the pre-Communist days, much of his time was preoccupied in adjudicating in internecine squabbles. With the Communist takeover large-scale banditry was eradicated on the Byang thang. This information was obtained in personal communication with Nor bzang, who is now an official with the Nag chu prefectural government.

49. About eight kilometers from the eastern lake shore is the gNam mtsho township headquarters. It is built in the monotonous, utilitarian style of the Chinese Communists. Its facilities include an elementary school reportedly with more than 60 pupils, a grain storage facility, dispensary, administrative units, a couple of small shops and a rudimentary truck stop hotel.






CHAPTER SIX

rTa rgo rin po che in History, Religion and Mythology

Introduction

The holiest and loftiest landform in the central Byang thang is rTa rgo rin po che, a range of nine glaciated peaks. These peaks host mountain divinities collectively as compelling as those of gNyan chen thang lha or Gangs ti se. Of the three mountains, rTa rgo rin po che is the least significant for Buddhists. Its spiritual value to the majority Buddhist community, with several notable exceptions, is marginal despite its fame in upper gTsang and the central Byang thang. For the Bon po, however, rTa rgo rin po che is among the most important of the sacred mountains. In fact, most Bon po consider it more central to their religion than gNyan chen thang lha. With rKong po Bon ri and Gangs ti se, rTa rgo rin po che forms a triad of mountains that best define the sacred geographical basis of Bon and its cult of mountains.

In Bon, rTa rgo rin po che is considered the bla brag (soul rock) of the religion.[1] As the bla brag of Bon, rTa rgo enshrines, protects and animates the religion as if it were a living organism. The factors cited by Bon po for this attribution revolve around the semi-legendary history of the region. In the pre-Buddhist period, rTa rgo is believed to have supported a flourishing civilization based on Bon culture and religion. As an ancient heartland of Bon, the mountain came to be identified as the geographical essence of the religion and a place of worship for its greatest personalities.

In the distant past, as today, the cult of the holy mountain was a core aspect of Bon and a physical manifestation of its tenets and traditions. rTa rgo rin po che is also cherished by the Bon po because it is believed to have been the protector of the Zhang zhung kingdom.[2] As a protector (bon skyong), rTa rgo is believed to have guarded the sanctity and sovereignty of Zhang zhung and to have been one of its key identifying symbols. There is a debate among Bon po whether Gangs ti se or rTa rgo was the pre-eminent mountain in Zhang zhung. Evidently, Bon literature is ambiguous on this matter. In the contemporary period, Gangs ti se is a larger destination for Bon pilgrims and, in practice, is more important than rTa rgo, However, in the time of Zhang zhung when rTa rgo was an important agricultural region, it may indeed have played a bigger part in the affairs of the kingdom than Gangs ti se. Another reason rTa rgo rin po che is so vital to Bon is that it is the bla ri of the Zhang zhung kings. The soul force and thus the

power of the Zhang zhung kings to rule is believed to have been harbored in the mountain. Thirteen hundred years have passed since the kings of Zhang zhung walked the earth, yet the tradition of their soul mountain has been passed on from generation to generation, and is one of the most prevalent pieces of historical lore found in the shadow of rTa rgo.

rTa go rin po che is either thought of as a single entity or as a related brotherhood of peaks, each with its own deities and identity. Both of these views are correct; while the range forms a brotherhood of peaks called the rTa rgo mched bdun rol brgyad (the rTa rgo brotherhood of the seven and eighth emanation), they are all subsumed under a ninth divinity called rTa rgo dge rgan (rTa rgo, the Venerable Ancient One). In this survey of rTa rgo, we will examine the traditions behind both the singular and multiple rTa rgo rin po che along with their interrelationships. One of the major physical differences between rTa rgo rin po che and the other male members of the Divine Dyads is that it is a range and not a single mountain. Since it consists of more than one peak, the sacred geography of rTa rgo is more complex than its counterparts.[3]

Idiomatically, rTa rgo rin po che is frequently known by other appellations, including rTa rgo dGe rgan (rTa rgo the Venerable Ancient One), rTa rgo gangs chen (rTa rgo the Great Mountain), rTa rgo gangs ri (rTa rgo Mountain), rTa rgo ri rgyud (rTa rgo Mountain Range), rTa rgo Lha gyab (Lha rgyab = region in northern Ngam ring county), rTa rgo lha chen (rTa rgo the Great Deity), Byang rta rgo (rTa rgo of the North), and rTa rgo dge bsnyen (rTa rgo Holder of the Upasaka Vows).[4] These names are all used interchangeably by the Bon po and Buddhists.

Bon and Buddhist Syncretism

One of the most noteworthy aspects of rTa rgo rin po che is that he is predominantly a Bon deity. There are no Bon legends of the mountain succumbing to any Buddhist saint, nor of being forcefully converted to the Buddhist religion. Moreover, no Mi la ras pa or Sangs rgyas yar byon came to the region to defeat Bon practitioners and open it up to the Buddhists. rTa rgo, at least on its north (the most important side which faces Dang ra g.yu mtsho) and east sides, stands in Bon po territory today as it has for countless centuries. The west side and the southern extremity of the mountain range lie in areas populated by Buddhists, but this has not changed its fundamental Bon identity. The remaining Bon po of the region live in the rTa rgo gtsang po valley from the mouth of the river south to its confluence with Nang ma gtsang po, and along the east and northwest shores of the Dang ra g.yu mtsho, This community staunchly maintains that rTa rgo is purely a Bon mountain. For them and other Bon po, rTa rgo is a gargantuan reminder of their religious and historical heritage.

Among the Buddhists of the La stod township on the west side of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, there is a tendency to claim that, while Dang ra g.yu mtsho is a Bon lake, rTa rgo is a Buddhist mountain. However, they offer no clear doctrinal or historical evidence to

corroborate this claim. Buddhists are reluctant to accept a Bon po deity as the supreme yul lha of the region, but many realize that convictions alone cannot erase the heritage of the mountain. Furthermore, in the vicinity of rTa rgo, Bon po outnumber Buddhists roughly three to one. In any event, doctrinal debates and sectarian differences are not such a pressing issue among the local inhabitants, since religious tolerance and even intermarriage between the communities appears to be the rule.

South of rTa rgo, in the district of La rgyab which is exclusively peopled by Buddhists, rTa rgo rin po che is the supreme yul lha. Here Buddhists have tried to bring rTa rgo under their auspices, with limited success. The subjugation of the mountain by Gu ru rin po che forms the basis of the Buddhist tradition of rTa rgo. Among some Buddhists of Lha rgyab a compromise was devised whereby the mountain's sphere of influence is explained in terms of an inner circle (nang skor) and an outer circle (phyi skor). The inner circle covers the immediate environs of the mountain and has a Bon identity, while the outer circle extends across Lha rgyab and has a Buddhist identity. Rather than being fully assimilated, the sovereignty of the mountain is given a dual identity and is divided into two discrete realms. While not universally accepted, this device has potential for maintaining sectarian harmony.

The monks of the bKa' rgyud Thong gling dgon pa in Tshwa rtse township begrudgingly accept that rTa rgo is a Bon mountain and that its yul lha is a Bon deity. For centuries, according to the monks, rTa rgo rin po che has been locked in mortal combat with the mountain deity sTobs rtse po, who lives atop a 6,418-meter-tall mountain which forms a spectacular backdrop to the monastery. According to local legend sTobs rtse po, a subsidiary yul lha of Lha gyab, has tried in vain to convert the taller and larger rTa rgo to Buddhism. As a result, sTobs rtse po sustained a serious wound to the stomach, whereas rTa rgo only a superficial injury to one of his legs. The monks of Thong gling have resigned themselves to the fact that their mountain will never vanquish rTa rgo.

The nearest contemporary Bon communities to rTa rgo rin po che are at La sbug and Bya dur 200 kilometers south-southwest and at gShen tshang 200 kilometers southeast. Even this overwhelming predominance of Buddhists on the Byang thang did not effect a complete conversion of the mountain. The reason is clear: rTa rgo is primarily located in Bon po territory and possession is usually the determining factor in the sectarian affiliation of topographical features.

rTa rgo - The Protector

gShen rab mi bo che is thought to be responsible for the conversion of rTa rgo to Bon. According to the *Bod yul gnas chen kyi lam yig,* the mountain deity received his dge snyen vows (householder vows) from gShen rab himself (Ramble: 95, Nag chu sa khul: 583). As with gNyan chen thang lha, the Bon po recognize that rTa rgo was not always

under their auspices and that his existence predates their religion. The typical Bon view is that he was a fierce, bloodthirsty deity inimical to higher religious traditions and sentiments. By forswearing his violent past, the mountain came under the grace and guidance of Bon and its proponents, and benefitted greatly from his new relationship with religion and human beings. Buddhists, of course, say the same thing about deities whom they wrested from Bon po control. The common denominator, labels and sectarian differences aside, is that indigenous deities such as rTa rgo had a bloody past from which they were redeemed.

. In the autobiography of Grub dbang bstan 'dzin rin chen (b. 1801), one of the greatest Bon scholars and practitioners of the 19th century, he recounts an experience which highlights rTa rgo's protector status (pp. 277-279). When Grub dbang bstan 'dzin rin chen came to the region to practice gcod, as part of the practice and in order to size up the character and strength of the mountain, he performed an examination called slong tshad which provoked the mountain. At their encounter rTa rgo asked Grub dbang bstan 'dzin rin chen the following questions, exhorting him to answer them honestly: 1) Who are you? 2) Where are you from? 3) Where are you going? 4) Why are you here? 5) What is your sect? 6) What stage of wisdom have you attained in your practice? 7) What are you doing to benefit sentient beings? 8) What lama do you follow? The ascetic replied to each of the queries: 1) he was of the sNyen rig 'dzin caste; 2) he was unborn (skye pa med) from space; 3) he was going to the Bon nyid (emptiness/nature of existence; 4) to liberate sentient beings and propagate teachings; 5) unmistakably g.Yung drung Bon; 6) perfected self-realization; 7) helping to liberate them; 8) Lama Tshul khrims, a manifestation of Kun tu bzang po.

Grub dbang bstan 'dzin rin chen in turn questioned rTa rgo, asking: 1) Are you a lha, 'dre or human? 2) Who is your lama? 3) Which buddha are you devoted to? 4) What teachings do you practice? 5) What kind of morality do you follow? 6) What kind of appearance do you have? rTa rgo's reply was lengthy. The mountain first stated that he belonged to the Sa g.yen bcu gcig class of elemental deities (a powerful yul lha class), and then volunteered his theogony (see p. 311). This was followed by a story answering the ascetic's remaining questions: during the virtuous eon (bskal po bzang po) of the Seventh Enlightened One (the buddha who precedes gShen rab mi bo che in the line of 1,000 buddhas) rTa rgo was a disciple of the lama bTsan bon dum pa mtshal lcags, who administered his dge bsnyen vows and gave him tantric oral transmissions. However, due to his contamination by humans, he experienced great suffering. In retaliation he unleashed his wrath on human society, causing terrible strife and epidemics. As a result, rTa rgo experienced many negativities.

rTa rgo observed that, in the current world age, gShen rab mi bo che conquered all elemental beings who offered their srog snying to him and made them into worldly protectors. At this time the mountain requested teachings from gShen rab to bring about instantaneous enlightenment, but he was refused. gShen rab reminded him that he had broken vows made to his root teacher and therefore instantaneous enlightenment was

not possible. gShen rab noted that one's root teacher is more important than the Buddha himself. In order for rTa rgo to obtain enlightenment, gShen rab instructed him to avoid harming sentient beings and to practice compassion. gShen rab explained that by remaining a protector of the Bon doctrine throughout his reign (current world age) he would find enlightenment. This was his reason for being here, rTa rgo told Grub dbang bstan 'dzin rin chen. He added that he had continuous audiences and transmissions from great masters, including Dran pa nam mkha' and Sad ne ga'u.



rNam par rgyal ba

In the authoritative bskang ba text *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas bdag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs* (Offerings of Praise Specially Enjoined to Satisfy All the Desires that Arise from the Great Gods of Existence, Mountain-Lake, Brother-Sister, Master of the Sacred Place) by Nyi ma bstan 'dzin (b. 1813), the 22nd abbot of sMan ri gling, the apotropaic qualities of rTa rgo are graphically connected with some of Bon's most famous protective deities (pp. 123,124). On the summit of rTa rgo rNam par rgyal ba, a form of gShen rab in his victory over evil forces aspect is flanked by the rgyan bdun (seven ornaments) of two dragons, two lions, two chu srin and one khyung whose function is to devour demons.[5] Also sharing the summit are the bDer gshegs gtso bzhi (the Four Enlightened Chiefs) of the bDer shegs stong rtsa (One Thousand Enlightened Beings).[6] Just below the summit of the mountain, at its 'throat', are the mGon po rnam gsum[7] and the 360 deities of the Ge khod cycle. On the middle part of rTa rgo, the 'torso' of the mountain, are the dPal mgon brgya dang rtsa brgyad (108 Protectors of the Bon Doctrine). At the base of the mountain, its root, in a great cemetery is the Mahasiddha gSang ba 'dus pa who presides over a very wrathful group of spirits subdued by him. The text proceeds to state that because of these associations, the mountain is a fit object of worship, and that prayers directed to him will bring good luck (p. 125).

The text digresses at this point to give a synoptic account of the apocalyptic struggle between the gods and demons.[8] This tale, inspired by the Indian myth of the battle between the devas and asuras, demonstrates the great power vested in the Bon deities associated with rTa rgo rin po che. By extolling the superlative qualities of the deities, the author enhances the standing of the mountain and its protective function. In this epic struggle the gods are represented as white and the demons as black—the characteristic color dualism.

The text relates that, in the primordial past, a group of nine terrifying demons led by the gnam 'dre plagued humans with disease, famine and strife and waged war against

their protectors, the gods (p. 125). The wisdom gods (ye shes lha) were unhappy about this war. dBal chen ge khod travelled to the south of the seven world mountains and hurled a golden bomb into the seas which caused them to boil (p. 126). The mountains began to burn and the world was engulfed by the oceans three times. The demons were suitably terrified and Ku byi mang ke (the mind manifestation of Ge khod) demonstrated his superiority by blessing the defeated demons with holy water. The demons swore an oath to protect the Bon doctrine in exchange for the deity's protection and were ordered to obey Bon practitioners when called upon (p. 127). The demons readily agreed to Ku byi mang ke's conditions and promised to serve Bon like a father does his son.

Thereupon all the people and gshen became happy and the world became prosperous. The reader is reminded that the next time the world deteriorates this scripture will aid the devotee and thus is very precious. In this tale we once again see the underlying theme of demonic creatures being defeated and converted into protectors. Not only Buddhism but Bon also resorts to this stratagem to assert its control over the landscape and its resident beings. The great opponents in the epic myth are the gnam 'dre. The 'dre are ordinarily a class of chthonic beings, but here they have been turned into demons of the sky. Not content with a demonic underworld force the 'dre are permitted to roam the celestial sphere, a quality that adds to their perniciousness.

After the defeat of the demons the text returns to rTa go and Dang ra, and refers to them as wrathful protectors who subdue disturbances, chiefs of the region, and great heroes of the surrounding countryside (p. 128). rTa rgo in particular is called Dral po dge rgan mtha' 'dul dpa' bo (dGe rgan, Hero Cleaver and Conqueror of the Frontiers). rTa rgo and Dang ra have seven appointed helpers, called De yi grogs byed lha rje mched bdun. The text continually emphasizes that rTa rgo is a protective deity. His primary function is to protect Bon and to spread its teachings in the north country; his attributes are designed to eliminate disturbances to the Bon teachings and to destroy vow breakers (p. 135). We encountered this dual function of protecting and propagating the religion in our survey of gNyan chen thang lha. In contemporary Tibetan ecclesiastical thought, protection and propagation of the religion are the two main functions of the indigenous pantheon.

rTa rgo - The Yul lha

While rTa rgo is an important Bon skyong with many affinities to the higher deities, he is a yul lha at heart. First and foremost he is a guardian of worldly concerns for the residents in his vicinity. As such, his function is identical to that of gNyan chen thang lha. While associations with doctrinal deities, theological orientations and the religious status of rTa rgo and gNyan chen thang lha vary, the environmental and social stewardship of the two mountains and the essence of the cult of mountains is the same.

Subsequent embellishments can be shorn away to reveal the fundamental nature of the cult of protective mountains. The role of the custodian of life is primary in the minds of the farmers and herders who invoke and worship rTa rgo and gNyan chen thang lha, so that survival and then pursuance of prosperity are the priorities. It is in this context, that the yul lha holds sway over the culture of Tibet.

This stress on the flesh-and-blood aspect of rTa rgo does not detract from the ennobling aspects of the Bon and Buddhist doctrines with their lofty aims of the attainment of wisdom and liberation. However, higher religious sentiments rest on the viability of the culture and way of life. rTa rgo, like gNyan chen thang lha, faithfully models the hierarchical arrangement of the functions of religion from the most mundane to the transcendental. In essence, the worship of rTa ro rin po che is recognition of the fact that spiritual endeavors are facilitated by a secure physical and economic environment.

The brilliant 14th century Bon practitioner rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan was well aware of the fact that humanity first needs material support and solace. In his bskang ba text *Lha chen rta sgo'i mchod bskang zhes bya ba bzhugs* he expresses his sensitivity to the exigencies of survival.[9] The five perfect sense offerings[10] and gtor ma are offered to rTa rgo, his retinue, his distant circle (yang skor) and all his manifestations in return for their assistance (p. 179). rTa rgo is enjoined to protect and maintain the health of his benefactors, not to allow their property to be violated, to protect fields from hail like a weather-maker, to open golden treasures like a treasure god (nor lha), to be a road god (lam lha) to travellers, and to be a prescient guide (p. 179). The requests continue and rTa rgo is asked to conquer all enemies like a general and to eat the flesh and blood of adversaries and disturbances of the doctrine (pp. 179,180). The nature of the requests is straightforward and explicit. At the end of the petition, the text reminds rTa rgo that he should never be removed from his devotees, that he should not transgress their pact and, furthermore, that he should be their servant and fulfil their requests (p. 180).

The weather-maker, lam lha, nor lha, dgra lha and srog lha are all prototypical roles of the mountain deity. rTa rgo fulfils his primary functions today as he did in the 14th century, or in the time of Zhang zhung. As such, the unalloyed cult of the mountain god is a cultural anachronism with a remarkable degree of continuity and persistence. Taken as a whole, it is Tibet's most important surviving cultural trait. The continuity of the traditions of rTa rgo and the other members of the Divine Dyads are a supreme example of this cultural conservatism.

The prototypical roles of rTa rgo in contemporary Bon culture may be explained as follows: the weather-maker is a highly relevant personality for both the individual and community. Like gNyan chen thang lha, rTa rgo rin po che has a direct bearing on the weather of the region and even further afield in the gTsang province. When rTa rgo is happy and satisfied, he brings seasonal weather, but unfortunately the inverse is also true. The years 1993 to 1995 saw three summers of unusually dry weather which damaged pastures, significantly reduced the amount of winter fodder, impeded the

growth of livestock and cut income. For many it was an accepted fact that the poor weather was exacerbated by the mountain deity, but this was tempered by a belief that conditions were largely assignable to events of national significance, and thus the yul lha of Tibet as a whole were implicated. There is a palpable fear that the relatively large influx of non-Tibetans on the Byang thang, the growth of the mining industry, commercial hunting and the pollution of waterways are angering rTa rgo and countless other local protectors. The latent wrath, unpredictability and enormous strength of rTa rgo have created anxiety among the population.

Some believe that the demise of the golden age of Zhang zhung in the region can partially be attributed to rTa rgo's act of chronically diminishing rainfall. According to local oral tradition, forests of juniper and other trees which once flourished on the mountain slopes were denuded until rTa rgo was forced to take extreme measures. He punished the people by desiccating the land, which caused massive depopulation of the region.

The significance of a mountain with the legendary breadth and depth of rTa rgo rin po che extends far beyond its immediate environs. Through either a process of emanation or visitation, rTa rgo's ability to influence the weather is immense. For example, rTa rgo plays a part in the ritual weather practices of the village of On 'bug located on the banks of the mDog gzhung gtsang po in Lha rtse county, 180 kilometers southeast of the rTa rgo range. About one kilometer upstream from the village, on the end of a rocky spur jutting into the valley, is a btsan khang dedicated to Byang rta rgo. This red shrine is about two-and-a-half meters tall. According to local legend, a very long time ago On 'bug was plagued by crop-destroying hail storms. In order to protect their crops, the villagers appealed to Byang rTa rgo. He appeared to the villagers and promised to render assistance. As recognition of his help this btsan khang was built for his worship. It should be noted that in On 'bug, rTa rgo and the village yul lha (rGyal chen bsod nams dpal lha) are separate entities.

Invocations are often made to rTa rgo the weather-maker. A typical one is found in the bskang ba text *gNas chen bdag lcam dral gyi gzer bu'i cha lag kyi spyi dgos phrin bcol bas pa myur sgrub bzhugs* by mChog sprul bstan 'dzin tshul khrims (p. 252).[11] Its stated purpose is to bring rainfall at the right time, for proper ripening and fecundity of crops, for seasonal weather in both summer and winter, for the elimination of disease and for the good health of livestock.

As a lam lha rTa rgo rin po che protects and guides travellers. It is not uncommon for people to make bsangs evocations to the deity in this capacity before embarking on a journey. The lam lha is particularly important to the 'brog pa, who invoke him before migrations and when they must travel away from home to sell their produce or to procure provisions. An invocation to rTa rgo the lam lha is found in the bskang ba text of mChog sprul bstan 'dzin tshul khrims (p. 254). This prayer excellently defines the function of the lam lha. It reads: "Act as our lam lha, our travel protector. Wherever we go please fulfil our needs. Guide us to where we should stay and what we should do while

travelling. During our travels protect us from thieves, robbers, enemies and dangerous, wild animals. Dispel all obstacles and guide us to our destination. Welcome us when we arrive and when we depart (i.e. at all times)."

The inhabitants of the rTa rgo region believe that the health of a living being is directly related its srog (vital essence). rTa rgo, like gNyan chen thang lha or Gangs ti se, possesses a srog of enormous proportions harbored deep in the mountain in a secret and unassailable place. As the srog lha or srog bdag, rTa rgo directly mediates in the state of health of all beings, incarnate and incorporeal, who live within his domain. The protection of an individual's srog is not the responsibility of rTa rgo alone but is rather more often entrusted to higher deities such as the life-holding deities (tshe 'dzin lha). rTa rgo as a srog lha appears to be now largely superseded by other members of the Bon pantheon.

rTa rgo is a dgra lha in the literal sense of a being who protects a worshipper from his enemies. As we see when examining the iconography of rTa rgo in his btsan and gnyan forms, he is a virtually invincible martial protector. The wrathful side of rTa rgo's personality protects those that worship him and in the past contributed to militarism and inter-regional aggression. We can infer that the Zhang zhung kings, who had rTa rgo as their soul mountain, conceived him as a mighty protector embodying qualities such as bravery, aggression, prowess, resourcefulness and resoluteness. These are specifically the qualities that the modern inhabitants of Nag tshang and La rgyab affirm the mountain still possesses. The Bon po of Nag tshang especially stress the warrior-like qualities of rTa rgo in a historical context and present them as one of the reasons for Zhang zhung's erstwhile greatness.

There are many wealth deities (nor lha) in Tibet. Sacred mountains such as rTa rgo rin po che fill this role well because they are guardians of the land, which harbors both mineral and vegetable wealth. The close association of rTa rgo with the physical environment and ecological processes reinforces his function as a nor lha. Although there are famous wealth deities like rNam thos sras which are actively worshipped in the region for their ability to increase an individual's g.yang and phywa, the mountain is very important in this regard. Neither the g.yang shes phywa Bon rites of the Shes pa bcu gnyis nor more modern tantric rites could dislodge rTa rgo's function of wealth bestowal. This preoccupation with material conditions is given free expression with rTa rgo, since there are fewer moral compunctions in worshipping a worldly deity in this way than with one of the higher protectors, where an altruistic motivation is all important.

rTa rgo's function as a wealth deity is closely allied with the yul lha rTa rgo, the most important of its kind in Lha rgyab and western Nag tshang (under the Communists are analogous with Nyi ma and parts of Ngam ring counties). Immediately west of Nag tshang, in the mTsho chen district of the mNga ris region, the influence of rTa rgo as a protector of the land is superseded by Gangs rin po che. In eastern Nag tshang the most momentous yul lha is rGya sgang bkra shis lha mo, who is unrelated to rTa rgo rin po che.[12] However, in gZhung ru, an area in Sa dga' county, rTa rgo once again becomes the

most important yul lha.[13]

The yul lha or gzhi bdag outside rTa rgo's territory operate autonomously in the same fashion as those found outside the sphere of influence of gNyan chen thang lha. The Divine Dyads are the tri-polar hubs of the Byang thang, but within their bounds is an entire decentralized network of numinous landforms. Thus two opposing but interrelated dynamic forces create territorial interdependence and territorial independence. The impetus on a national level was towards geographical consolidation, while on the individual community level it was the manipulation of sacred geography to foster a localized identity.

Well beyond its contiguous zone of control, rTa rgo emerges as the yul lha of a single village in the dMu valley called sGrol thang, located not far from sLi lung dgon pa, which was an important Sa skya monastery before the Communist period. The story of how the mountain deity came to be worshipped here seems to have been lost. A yul lha shrine (rten mkhar), decorated with a sun and moon design dedicated to the btsan form of rTa rgo, overlooks the village. rTa rgo is worshipped with prayers that have been adapted to Buddhism and by making a special kind of gtor ma. In one of these entreaties the entire Bon character of the gsol kha is intact, the only modification being the interpolation of a single line: "If you do not act on my behalf you will be contravening your Upasaka vows made in the presence of sLob dpon padma (Gu ru rin po che)."[14] Through this connection with the great Vajrayana master, the mountain happily becomes the country god of a Buddhist village in upper gTsang. Such adaptations render the debate as to whether rTa rgo is a Bon or Buddhist deity academic.[15]

As a yul lha, rTa rgo discharges the same duties as gNyan chen thang lha—that is, he protects the sanctity, fecundity and integrity of the country. While governments are subject to decay, the rule of rTa rgo will last for the duration of this world. The perennial character of the mountain's sovereignty and its supernatural associations make it an adjunct to temporal rule. Like other gods of the country, rTa rgo has both a pacific and wrathful side to his personality. The ugliest side of his personality is related to droughts, earthquakes,[16] freak snowstorms and other destructive forces of nature. Conversely, wildflowers, crystal clear streams, medicinal plants and precious minerals are seen as the endowments of his regal nature.

The duality of rTa rgo's personality melds with the doctrine of karma. Whatever befalls the population at the hands of the yul lha is believed to be solely their own doing and responsibility. The deity's quixotic nature comes into play when people attempt to interpret what behavior led to the physical realities. Perceptions of how the mountain has specifically contributed to one's success or misfortune are open to individual interpretation. The uncertainty involved here has led to a certain level of fear and anxiety reflected in the preoccupation with ritually appeasing and placating the mountain.

The 'brog lha (god of the pasture) rTa rgo is essentially an offshoot of the yul lha in its role as protector of the grasslands and livestock. This function of the mountain is

paramount in an economy based on pastoralism. Even the residents of the agricultural villages of Dang ra keep and rear large numbers of animals, and often a family's members are split between those who farm and those who herd animals. In a land where vicious weather can all but destroy a family's herds, the need for a spiritual protector of animals is seen as essential. While many higher deities can fulfil the role of protector, their power and status make them less approachable in reference to everyday concerns. Moreover, as an aboriginal guardian rTa rgo has been protecting animals far longer than other contemporary deities. Hunting is still regulated by rTa rgo as it is by gNyan chen thang lha and other yul lha. In a spiritual sense, rTa rgo is imagined as the owner of all animals in his territory.

The Personality of the Unitary rTa rgo



rTa rgo dge rgan-east face

Like his mountain counterparts in the other two Dyads, rTa rgo is conceived of as the king of all the deities of the three realms (srid gsum) and the epicenter of the universe. He and his servants have a triadic personality consisting of lha, btsan and klu which is embellished with other deities of the vertically-oriented cosmos. The mountain forms an axis, corresponding to its srog shing, which pierces the three realms of existence and links them together in a coherent whole. It is the hallowed mountain which gave the early Bon tiered cosmological system its continuity and integrity. Without the sacred mountain to serve as a world pillar, the cosmos would lack unity.[17]

One of the most complete descriptions of rTa rgo is found in the *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas dag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs*. In the section which describes the higher Bon deities residing on the mountain (pp. 123,124), rTa rgo is specifically called Gangs gnyan rta rgo. This denotes that he and gNyan chen thang lha both belong to the gnyan class of semi-divine beings. gNyan rum gnam dkar (White Heaven Womb of the gNyan), a son Chu lcam rgyal mo and Sangs po 'bum khri, was the ancestor of the mountain gods. rTa rgo manifests as four different gnyan deities (pp. 139,140). rTa rgo's affiliation with the gnyan specifically draws the two mountains together. These are the two most famous examples of gnyan on the Byang thang and among the best known from this class of semi-divine beings in Tibet.

rTa rgo has other appellations in this text, as befits a powerful protector. For instance, he is called bDud 'dul lha (Subduer of bDud Demons), Srid pa'i lha (God of Existence) or simply Bla brag (Soul Rock)(p. 133). In the description of his mountain form (pp. 133,134), the text states that Mount rTa rgo is surrounded by a treasure of nectarous waters and reposes in the center of 100,000 yul lha and gnyan. The peak of the towering mountain floats in the celestial sphere (gung), and since the primordial past the summit of the mountain has been covered with a crystal tent of snow. On the flanks of the

mountain are slate stones, sacred white earth (btsag dkar po) and sacred red earth (rgya mtshal). On the lower part of the mountain are verdant gardens, and on the ground level, are gardens of incense herbs and 'om bu (tamarisk).[18]

The ordinary form of rTa rgo, called bDud 'dul dge rgan dpa' bo (dGe rgan the Hero Subduer of the bDud), is described next (p. 134).[19] He has a peaceful nature and smiling countenance, is red and white in color, and wears the white hat of Bon (Bon dkar zhwa) with a crystal knob on top of it and the secret blue robes of Bon (gsang gos sngon pa gsol). In his right hand, he holds the golden gshang, the king of 100,000 sounds, and, in his left hand, a phur ba which he ritually rotates. This description constitutes the classic form of rTa rgo dge rgan. A couple of other forms of the unitary rTa rgo are briefly described in the same text (p. 135). Sometimes rTa rgo manifests as the holder of a great vinaya ('dul ba) lineage, wearing the dress of a monk, holding a golden gshang in his right hand and a divination arrow in his left. In this form he is the protector of the vinaya teachings. In another form, combating enemies of Bon, he is known as dGra 'dul dpa' bo che (the Great Hero Who Subdues Enemies). In this manifestation he appears as a terrific klu btsan with a frightening dark red face. In his right hand, he brandishes a snake lasso and in his left hand he displays a banner. He leads an army of klu and gnyan.

In the text *Lha chen rta sgo'i mchod bskang zhes bya ba zhugs* a variant description of the mountain is given (p. 169):

> "Hail to the beautiful white snow mountain, it is very large and well situated like ri rab lhun po. The summit of the mountain nearly touches the top of the heavens (nam mkha' dbyings), and clouds clothe it like a standing white tent. Its head is covered in mists that resembles a turban, and the sun and moon shine over it. The top of rTa rgo is also attired in a rainbow of five colors. In the middle reaches of the mountain are unassailable rock formations. At the base are treasure-filled waters. The surrounding country is full of blossoming flowers. Fruit trees and herbs grow on the slopes in incalculable numbers. The mountain's brothers and sisters—the wild animals—play around him, birds with melodious voices sing, and 'brong frolic. Many eagles glide around the mountain."

The mountain is now praised for providing every kind of resource for eating, drinking and enjoyment and is called rTa rgo gangs kyi lha btsan (the Lha btsan of rTa rgo Mountain) and mNga' bdag (Lord/Sovereign)(p. 170).

A brief description of the mountain is found in the gsol kha text *rTa sgo dwangs ra gsol mchod bzhugs so*.[20] The mountain reposes in a conch white sky. Its outer appearance is like a snow mountain; its inner appearance is that of a palace of the gods.

We have now encountered a btsan (rTa rgo gangs kyi lha btsan) and a gnyan (Gangs gnyan rta rgo) form of rTa rgo. Of the two forms, the btsan variety is more prevalent in the mountain's gsol kha and bskang ba texts. rTa rgo is a btsan in six or seven of his

subsidiary forms. He is also less commonly a gnyan. rTa rgo's assumption of the two most important classes of semi-divine beings in the intermediate sphere is clearly due to his prominence as a god of the soil. As with gNyan chen thang lha's son, rDo rje rkyang khra, rTa rgo embodies both classes of chthonic beings, one characteristically yellow, and one red.

In the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* there is yet another name of rTa rgo, which could well predate his identity as both btsan and gnyan. In the *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas dag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs* the mountain is referred to as rTa rgo sad wer (rTa rgo the King Deity)(p. 113). Sad wer, a Zhang zhung term, translates in Tibetan as 'King of the Lha'. This is precisely rTa rgo's role in the region today. The sad and sad mo of the Indian Himalaya districts of Lahoul sPi ti and Khu nu are primitive deities that inhabit mountains, trees and springs.[21] They are thought to be very wrathful and to have a malevolent or demonic side to their personalities. While they still accept animal sacrifice, they are more commonly offered incense, yarn, butter and tufts of wool.

rTa rgo rin po che can manifest as numerous animals through the projection of his bla into the creatures he wishes to possess. He is able to accomplish this because he is the undisputed master and lord of all animals in his territory. Once again, the most common animal manifestation is once again the wild or domesticated yak. This divine animal is called the lha'i g.yag 'brong dkar po, who is characteristically white. It is the same type of creature found at gNyan chen thang lha, Gangs ti se and other sacred mountains on the Byang thang. The lha'i g.yag 'brong dkar po is the archetypal bovid of the Byang thang, who protects both livestock and human beings, and is involved in of spirit-mediumship. According to well-circulated legends, the divine yak is customarily found on the heights of rTa rgo, and is larger and more beautiful than the ordinary members of the species.

Before the advent of the modern form of Bon, we can postulate that the protomorphic divine yak exercised a central role in the mythology of rTa rgo. Not only is the yak the most economically important animal but it is physically the largest and most powerful, all of which heavily contributed to its divinity. At Gangs ti se, Ge khod was originally a mountain god in the form of a ferocious yak, which rose in status to become a tutelary deity (Karmay 1975: 197,198). Though the historical and cultural processes that led to this transition are not well understood, it appears that the same mechanisms were at work at rTa rgo, where primitive theriomorphic deities evolved over time to become the complex deities of assimilated Bon. The only reference to the lha'i g.yag dkar po in the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* is found in the *Lha chen rTa sgo'i mchod bskang zhes bya ba bzhugs*, where, along with the btsan and bdud, lha'i g.yag dkar po is called a brother of rTa rgo (p. 178).

In our exposition on gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho, two other kinds of special yaks were mentioned—the tshe thar, an animal that is spared from harm, and the yak whose father is a yul lha and whose mother is an ordinary animal. The offering

of animals (originally certain wild animals) to the yul lha and the interbreeding of a divinity with a biological yak are archaic customs found at rTa rgo as well, serving the purpose of drawing the mountain into a most intimate relationship with the pastoral culture. The stud yak (spo bo), likewise, has a special role in the beliefs of the 'brog pa of the rTa rgo region. It is the guardian of the herd and in turn receives its protection and guidance from rTa rgo.

The three types of special yaks enumerated above all have particular relationships with rTa rgo. The divine-biological crossbreed is genetically part of the holy mountain. The tshe thar is under his special protection as a gift to him, and the spo bo is led by the yul lha and is possessed by his consciousness or will. These contrast with the lha'i g.yag dkar po, which is a direct manifestation of the mountain and is entirely a supernatural creature (although it can manifest in animal form). In the gNam mtsho region the highly rare, pure white stud yak in the is considered a manifestation or incarnate form of lha'i g.yag dkar po. In the assimilated Bon tradition, the lha'i g.yag is associated with Ge khod and features in the 'cham dances.

There are at least two other kinds of yaks considered to have a sacred status.[22] One of these is the btsan g.yag, a special red yak selected as an emissary or manifestation of the btsan. It is decorated with multicolored tassels in its ears, has its head anointed with butter and its back smeared with red earth. The other type of sacred yak is the nor lha, an animal selected from the herd and given a sacred status. This animal is supposed to help ensure the prosperity of the herd. In pre-Buddhist rites the yak was one of the guides who led the dead to the afterlife (Richardson 1990: 5).[23]

From the aboriginal substrate yaks, sacred mountains and elemental deities have formed three pillars of the 'brog pa folk religion. Although these beliefs are ingrained in 'brog pa culture, they have been overlooked by proponents of the modern religions. If not for the exhaustive list provided by rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan of rTa rgo's relatives and associates, even the lha'i g.yag dkar po would have been ignored in literary sources.

The bskang ba text by Abbot Nyi ma bstan 'dzin states that rTa rgo can assume any of the manifestations of the zhi rgyas dbang drag activities ('phrin las), such as flying in the sky on a khyung and roving in space on a 'brong (p. 139). The text adds that rTa rgo rides in the air (rlung) on a 'brong and wanders the earth on various domestic and wild animals (p. 139). Returning to the text by rTogs ldan nam kha' blo ldan, rTa rgo is said to have in his retinue a force of 21,000 sman mo, 360 cavalry, and manifestations that include tigers, lions, bears, 'brong, flying birds and mi 'dre (p. 186). Like gNyan chen thang lha, rTa rgo can manifest as a khyung. Next to the yak, the khyung is the most popular non-anthropomorphic form of the mountain divinity. The khyung is so closely allied to the mountains of the Dyads that, in its aboriginal form, it is a mountain deity.

The khyung, whose habitat is the very heights of rTa rgo, lives at the edge of the world near the borders of space. Its protective presence is said to be felt by people who live near rTa rgo. It is believed that the loftiness of the mountain makes it an ideal

refuge for this mythical animal. In contemporary Bon beliefs, the ancient eagle-like protector of rTa rgo has become assimilated with the demon-devouring rgyan bdun of rNam par rgyal ba, whose uppermost animal is the khyung. The origins of the khyung's deification seem to lie in the sky and the soaring majesty of eagles and other raptors common to the Byang thang. The legend of the origins of the name Zhang zhung, its role in Bon, and the frequency of the khyung in cave art make a good case for the belief that the khyung is native to the Byang thang.

In the text by rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan, other manifestations of rTa rgo are recorded as well. Instead of the wolf we find the bear. Tales of sngags pa and ma ni pa with the ability to magically transform themselves into bears are occasionally told on the Byang thang. Bear skin robes are an attribute of pre-Buddhist deities. Bear's teeth, bile and brains are used medicinally, and bear flesh is believed to be useful against diseases caused by evil spirits (Das: 645). The bear as a manifestation of rTa rgo is most probably an ancient tradition. While the economic pre-eminence of the yak has permitted it to remain closely united with the mountain in the popular religious beliefs, less economically important animals have had diminished associations with rTa rgo through the introduction of more modern religious ideas.

rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan cites an intriguing manifestation of rTa rgo, the mi 'dre. The mi 'dre, a being which can be best described as a wild man, is as close to the popular western conception of the Abominable Snowman as exists in Byang thang culture. The belief in such a creature, or in the related 'dre mo and 'dre mong (yeti), is so prevalent it prevents most Tibetans from spending the night alone in the wilds of the Byang thang. There is an overt belief that these creatures eat human beings. It is not uncommon for single travellers to be asked if they have seen such a creature, or for surprise to be expressed that a person is undertaking to travel alone. The mi 'dre, like the btsan, klu or other elemental spirits, is still a source of both fascination and anxiety for the inhabitants of the Byang thang. Not all of them have yet been brought under the protective custody of Bon and Buddhism, and they continue to haunt the barren plains and wastelands of the Byang thang. An important strategy for repelling their attacks is the worship of their master, rTa rgo, or any of the other members of the Divine Dyads.

The bskang ba text offers some insight into the beings with whom rTa rgo is most affiliated with (pp. 177,178) in the context of a variety of offerings made to them as well as to rTa rgo and his mate. They include Jo mo lha ri a mountain, and Jo mo 'bri rje, who are described as faithful friends of rTa rgo. The former is undoubtedly a mountain deity. The nine ma sangs brothers are also mentioned along with three kinds of rTa rgo's assistants ('khor gsum mdzes pa). The reference to the ma sangs might be an allusion to the ancient ancestral function of rTa rgo, which had been long overshadowed by lamaism when this account was written.

We also find in this text the seven bya btsan who dwell in the northern mountains and are under the dominion of rTa rgo lha and the Byang bstan grags pa (the Famous bTsan of the North). These btsan are probably the btsan hosts of a wide swath of the

Byang thang. The bya btsan is a kind of spirit bird or ornithomorphic btsan. Here again it is indicated that there is a link between the sacred birds and the Divine Dyads; that is, unless bya is a misspelling of byang. Two more male friends of rTa rgo are recorded: Thog rol rje (Playful Thunderbolt Lord), described as the king of g.Yung (a place of black slate stones), and Drag pa btsan (Noble bTsan). Also mentioned is Gyer rgod khro mo and gSer mda' g.yu sgron (Golden Arrow Turquoise Lamp). The former is one of the protectors we met at bKra shis do chung and the latter may be a brtan ma goddess.

The most mysterious of rTa rgo's friends mentioned in rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan's text is Ri bsgyur rgyal mo thu mo che (the Great Powerful Queen Who Changes the Mountains). She is only described as wearing a kind of headgear called a re thod (sic ras thod = cotton turban). She is enigmatic: who is this deity that has the power to change mountains and in what way does she change them? Possibly this is a 14th century veiled reference to an earlier zeitgeist, a vestigal memory of a great goddess who once ruled supreme. The mere name of a single deity does little to elucidate the prehistory of religion in the region but the absence of a modern perspective from which this deity can be viewed indicates its significance to an era lost in time. The name of Ri bsgyur rgyal mo thu mo che in a bskang ba is yet another piece of evidence suggesting the existence of a matriarchal culture and the supremacy of female deities in prehistory.

Phyug mtsho (in reference to Dang ra) and the 21,000 sman mo of the north are mentioned as friends of rTa rgo. Either as his wife, sister or ally, Dang ra g.yu mtsho and her retinue are always connected with rTa rgo rin po che in the devotional texts. From the list of rTa rgo's friends we readily see that lha, btsan and sman are represented, demonstrating the mountain's involvement with the srid gsum. rTa rgo is interrelated with beings who encompass the breadth of the world. By integrating the tripartite, vertically-oriented world, either through conjugality, sanguinity or servitude, the entire gamut of sentient beings are drawn towards rTa rgo. As such rTa rgo is called a world support, a nexus for the multiplicity of beings residing in the universe.

rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo dan's text lists kLu mo btsan mo as the name of rTa rgo's mother (p. 170). Unfortunately, no other information or description of her is given. The belief that mountains and sa bdag have elemental deities as their parents is prevalent among both Bon po and Buddhists on the Byang thang. The parents of these sa bdag, yul lha and gzhi bdag, like the mountains themselves, are born with our present world system and will perish with it. Once again we encounter the generative function of the klu mo as the mother of the hallowed mountain. rTa rgo's most significant relationship is with the btsan; consequently, his mother is a btsan mo. In the text *rTa sgo'i gsol mchod*, used by 'brog pa at gNam mtsho who have rTa rgo as a clan deity, the mother of the mountain is referred to as kLu mo btsan rgyal ma, a variation of rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan's deity.

In rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan's bskang ba, the father of rTa rgo is Lha rgyal 'bum (the Lha King of One Hundred Thousand)(p. 170). He is described as being from a lineage originating from mDo khams (eastern Tibet—Khams and A mdo). The fathers

of prominent gzhi bdag in eastern Tibet are often called Lha rgyal 'bum. By integrating the lineage of rTa rgo with eastern Tibet, rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan implicitly unites the rTa rgo region with the flourishing Bon centers of eastern Tibet such as rGya rong and rNya ba. It is curious that the father of rTa rgo was not given a more overtly Zhang zhung lineage. This probably was because the old kingdom of Bon was already gone by the 14th century. The eastern Tibetan lineage of rTa rgo can be seen as part of the recasting of Bon that took place when the religion adopted a Buddhist outlook and content. Concomitant with this process was the geographical linking of remote western Bon enclaves—for example, Dang ra and La sbug with the new Bon heartland on the eastern margin of the Tibetan plateau.

The 'bum (hundred thousand) in Lha rgyal 'bum is not merely a number, but has the import of completeness, omnipotence and supremacy. The word 'bum is frequently employed to indicate the far-reaching superiority of a deity. In the *rTa sgo'i gsol mchod*, rTa sgo's father is called Lha rgyal 'bum gyi rje, a minor variation of Lha rgyal 'bum. As with the klu and btsan of rTa rgo's mother, we can infer that the lha were deities closely connected with the mountain in the Zhang zhung period. Another important point is that the klu, btsan and lha in the parentage of rTa rgo, once again neatly bring him into correspondence with the primary beings of the srid gsum.

The Theogony of rTa rgo rin po che

A classic Bon theogony of rTa rgo is found in the autobiography of Grub dbang bstan 'dzin rin chen as part of rTa rgo's response to the questions put forth to him by the author (p. 298). According to the text, rTa rgo and Dang ra appeared in primordial time as a reflection of the void (dbyings). Dang ra emitted rays of light which became the sky (nam mkha') and space (klong) came from the lake's reflection. These two unite to produce the srid pa'i lha. Barley-corn sized rays of red light descended to produce the voice of the lake, which combines with the radiance of the mountains to form an egg. From this egg, which hatches of its own accord, appear eight tiny luminous men—the rTa rgo brotherhood, which includes dGe rgan, 'Bum me rje, Ngo dmar rje, mChog dkar rje, dByugs pa rje, Zo ra rje, rNga khur rje and Ur skyu rje.

Dang ra g.yu bon bshad sgrub dar rgyas gling tsogs 'don sdus pa nor bu'i gter spungs bzhugs, a long ritual text consisting primarily of prayers and offerings to a panoply of Bon deities and religious personalities, touches upon the origins of the Dyad (p. 108).[24] The text states that the Dang ra gNas chen bdag lcam dral (which refers to Dang ra and rTa rgo) are among the 360 deities of Zhang zhung, the incarnations of the Yum chen mo (Great Mother) gNam phyi gung rgyal and the mGon po rnam gsum. Similarly, the text *gnas bdag lcam dral gyi gzer bu'i cha lag kyi spyi dgos phrin bcol bas pa myur sgrub bzhugs* (The Precise Means Required for the Master of the Sacred Place, the Brothers and Sisters to Swiftly Perform and Finish the Deeds they are Entrusted With Under Public Obligation) states that rTa rgo, the bla brag (soul rock of Bon), is a body manifestation of

gNam phyi gung rgyal (p. 259).

A more detailed account of the origins of rTa rgo is found in the *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas dag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs* (pp. 120,121). This classic Bon cosmogony begins with the descent of Srid pa'i rgyal po 'bum khri from the means (thabs) of the supreme god of wisdom (Ye shes lha mchog). Descending from Shes rab rol dkar, the dbyings kyi yum chen (the great mother of space), Shes rab yum chen chu lcam rgyal mo appeared. From the archetypal union of method and wisdom, which Sangs po 'bum khri and Chu lcam rgyal mo respectively represent, there came into existence 100,000 females and 10,000 males. Among these, the leader of all those leaning towards purity (dkar phyogs) and descending from the light of the mother archetype (A ma sprul ma) is the god Lha rgod thog pa, an incarnation of the minds of Sangs po 'bum khri and of gNam phyi gung rgyal, the incarnation of Chu lcam rgyal mo, who came into being to tame the wild beings of the world ('dzam gling). Gangs dkar ti tse, the bla ri of Bon, originates from a ray of light of Ye shes lha mchog. Gangs gnyan rta rgo, the bla brag of Bon, originated from a ray of light from the miraculous speech of Lha rgod thog pa.

As we can see from the preceding account, the original ancestors of humanity and rTa rgo (and Dang ra as well) are Sangs po 'bum khri and Chu lcam rgyal mo. The identical ancestry of humanity and sacred landforms is a distinguishing feature of the Bon tradition not found in Buddhism. This theme of man, mountain and lake being of the same origin is the legacy of an early epoch in religious development of Tibet. In assimilated Bon, however, this theme has been elaborated on to include tantric deities and primary tenets of tantricism, most notably the union of method and wisdom.[25] Again, we find that gNam phyi gung rgyal plays a crucial role in the cosmogony of rTa rgo and Dang ra. This sky-dwelling goddess of numerous hypostases and emanations overarches the entire Byang thang to assume the same generative function for all three Divine Dyads. As the ancestress of the three pre-eminent mountain and lake pairs, she is an important component in the formulation of the gnas chen gangs ri mtsho gsum tradition.

The Marriage of rTa rgo and Dang ra

The marriage of rTa rgo with Dang ra g.yu mtsho is a cornerstone of the mythology of the Divine Dyad. In the popular folklore of the region, the conjugal relationship between the rTa rgo and Dang ra completely dominates the friendship or sibling relationships alluded to in the texts. For the residents of the Dyad, the pairing of rTa rgo and Dang ra is the prototypical marriage because it is of cosmic proportion, primordial in origin, and unchanging.

In its aboriginal form, the g.yung drung of life was composed of two parts, the mountain and lake, which were inexorably joined together in the cosmic act of creation. In March 1874, the explorer Nain Singh learned "that according to local legend," rTa rgo yab and Dang ra yum "are the progenitors of the entire world" (Nain Singh: 171).

Even though there are more advanced doctrinal explanations of the nature of the relationship between Dang ra and rTa rgo, the belief in its cosmogonic power is still held in the Bon enclave. This myth of the miracle of existence as embodied in the srid pa'i lha rTa rgo yab and srid pa'i lha mo Dang ra yum, despite having wide currency, has been suppressed by more advanced doctrinal notions. There is a self-conscious attempt underway to discard the old myths and legends in favor of more modern perspectives.[26]

The diminution of the ancient mythology is the result of cultural changes effected by increased exposure to extraneous cultural and political influences. The policies and presence of the Communist regime have encouraged or coerced the population to rid themselves of "superstition" and to embrace a materialistic and atheistic world view. Change has also come from inside the Bon religion. There is a strong tendency among the learned Bon monks and scholars to negate or ignore beliefs they see as simplistic or without doctrinal merit and to facilitate a set of beliefs in harmony with the religion's philosophical traditions. This tendency is partially motivated by Bon apologists and their desire to conform with Buddhist thought. The local scholar bsTan pa rgyal mtshan, when asked what differences existed between the two religions, replied, "None whatsoever, in the same way it matters not who lights the butter lamps first" (Ma 1991: 61). This kind of attitude is very helpful in fostering sectarian understanding, but it also facilitates the dissipation of ancient Bon traditions.

The extraordinary creative powers of the Byang thang Dyads are usually hidden or modified in Bon literature. For example, the *Dzwo dmar glang chen 'gying ba*, a text describing the origins of the dbal zangs (a vessel used in the dbal chu rites of ritual purification), alludes to the creative potential of mTsho ma pang and rTa rgo (Gangs ti se)(Norbu 1995: 212-214). The passage reads: "In the vibrant land of Zhang zhung, the cutting potency (dbal ngar) of the snows of rTa rgo and the foam of the great lake Ma pang united with a miraculous wind. A light arose from the snow and a ray glowed from the rock; they shone on the lake and three eggs were born from the lake." The cosmogony of the dbal zangs continues as primordial deities, mountains, and finally nine weapons emerge from eggs.

In Bon literature, the Dyads are sometimes referred to as lcam dral (chief and lady). This descriptive term is applied to brother and sister or any man and woman, but can also connotate a husband and wife. The more explicit yab yum for husband and wife is rarely found. In Bon literature the conjugal relationship between Dang ra and rTa rgo is understated and only indirect references are made to it. A common allusion is to refer to the sacred pair as ri mtsho. One example is in the text of mdos rituals, *Ri mtsho gnas dag lcam dral gyi gzer bu'i cha lag btsan 'gro'i dpal dyin bzhugs*[27] by the sMan ri mkhan po, Nyi ma bstan 'dzin. In the bskang ba by abbot Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, the lcam dral are treated as a unit at the heart of a circle of deities (p. 141). The text states that the gNas chen bdag lcam dral have an inner circle (nang skor) consisting of 360 generals and a middle circle (bar skor) of 100,000 yul bdag. In the outer circle (phyi skor) are 10,000,000 servants

with frightening appearances dressed in bright clothes, carrying sharp-edged weapons and riding on various animal mounts. The text adds that all these of beings are faithful to the Bon doctrine and serve as allies to Bon practitioners. Praises are offered to all the members and their manifestations.

The mythic marriage of rTa rgo and Dang ra is also alluded to when they are called mtsho brag, another common appellation. Another rhetorical device used to show their intimacy is to describe Dang ra sitting to the right side of rTa rgo. Rather than making explicit references to the marriage of the Dyad, the texts downplay or cite it in the language of tantric philosophy. The cause for all this equivocation is that assimilated Bon, like Buddhism, wanted to divorce itself from the aboriginal environment-based traditions. This was not entirely possible, and Bon, to a larger extent than Buddhism, graciously accepted this reality out of pride in the traditions of Zhang zhung and the shes pa bcu gnyis. Nevertheless, tantric thought and traditions have come to thoroughly infiltrate the content of sacred geographical literature of Bon.

Throughout this survey of the central Byang thang Dyad, we are constantly reminded of the dominance of tantricism. This is, however, tempered by the oral traditions of rTa rgo and Dang ra. This modification of the older oral traditions by the literary traditions is also a key feature of gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho and of Tibetan sacred geography in general. The tendency is towards the abandonment of the oral traditions in favor of those based on literary sources.[28]

As with gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho, the union of rTa rgo and Dang ra in popular folklore led to offspring in the form of physical features. The best known of these children is a daughter called Dang chung mtsho, a small lake located immediately to the north of Dang ra g.yu mtsho. Due to the importance of the deities of the Dyad in their practice, the daughter Dang chung is even known to dpa' bo who live a great distance away and have not personally visited the region (Berglie 1980: 41,42). However, in literature Dang chung is most commonly a member of a sisterhood of lakes led by Dang ra. While Dang chung and other offspring of the Dyad are ignored in the gsol kha and bskang ba texts, they are an integral part of the folklore of the region. As we have seen, one motivation behind the compiling of the literature, none of which demonstrably dates before the 11th century, was to disseminate a more doctrinally advanced view of the Dyad as protectors in a tantrayana system.[29] No longer were the clerics and sages able to accept the Dyad simply as the progenitor of sacred topographs. The revision of the mythology of rTa rgo and Dang ra partially uprooted them from their environment-based aboriginal foundations, creating a less tangible and a more philosophically-oriented pair of deities.

The marriage of rTa rgo and Dang ra created several other notable physical features, including a mountain and yul lha called Zhal gangs 'jam located somewhere west of the Dyad.[30] Also to the west, children of the holy couple include 'Dug 'ul lha mo and Gur lang sman pa'i rgyal po. Although only a few sacred geographical features are explicitly parented by rTa rgo and Dang ra, their rule over a significant section of the central

Byang thang suggests that, at one time, this parentage extended to a variety of landforms. The concept of the Dyad as a spiritual and generative hub would have found special expression during the Zhang zhung period, when the region was politically and demographically far more important than in subsequent centuries. The few children remaining seem to be a mythological vestige of such a period.

rTa rgo mched bdun rol brgyad

On the one hand, there is the unitary rTa rgo, characterized by a singular mythology, iconography and personality. On the other there is the rTa rgo brotherhood, which reflects the geographical reality that rTa rgo is not a single mountain but a range of eight or nine mountains. In the environs of rTa rgo, the mythology of the brotherhood of mountains lives side by side with the unitary rTa rgo. There is ambiguity within the oral tradition as to whether the unitary rTa rgo dge rgan is the same deity as the leader of the rTa rgo mched bdun rol brgyad, Lha btsan 'bum me rje. Literary sources generally imply that rTa rgo Lha btsan 'bum me rje is the same deity as rTa rgo dge rgan by using the two names in tandem or interchangeably.

However, many residents of the Bon po enclave assert that rTa rgo dge rgan and Lha btsan 'bum me rje are different deities, or that the latter is a manifestation of the former. They claim that rTa rgo dge rgan is not a btsan, citing his white complexion and pacific demeanor to support their argument. They also maintain that the two live on separate mountain peaks—the tallest mountain is the residence of rTa rgo dge rgan, and that the home of Lha btsan 'bum me rje is a peak tucked away in another part of the mountain range. Following this tradition, there are eight related rTa rgo peaks plus one standing alone. Groups of deities often form enneads in Bon, a fact which lends weight to the claim. There is some indirect evidence for eight subsidiary rTa rgo peaks in the texts of the *rTa dang tshogs bskang*. In the bskang ba of Abbot Nyi ma bstan 'dzin (pp. 101-103), invocations are made to rTa rgo dge rgan and the seven lha btsan. This same arrangement is found in a visualization of the 360 Ge khod deities (p. 97). In both of these accounts no mention is made of Yul sa dkar po, which would be the eighth subsidiary rTa rgo deity.

Were there not other evidence available, the claim made in the oral accounts for a ninth rTa rgo would seem apocryphal. However, written substantiation for the belief in the rTa rgo ennead is found in the one folio text of invocations to the Dyad entitled *rTa dang gnyis kyis bskul ba bzhugs* attributed to Zhang zhung Hri pa gyer med and purportedly written in the Zhang zhung period.[31] In this text, after the list of the rTa rgo mched bdun rol brgyad, a ninth deity is listed, dGe rgan mthu bo rje (the Powerful Venerable Ancient Lord). Although the historical validity of gter ma texts such as this one are seriously called into question, this remains the only text available which explicitly makes provision for a ninth rTa rgo deity.

In light of oral and written evidence substantiating dGe rgan as a ninth rTa rgo,

there is a strong likelihood that this is based on Zhang zhung tradition and was de rigueur in the mythology of the Zhang zhung period. Why then did later authors living in a Buddhist-dominated society choose to ignore rTa rgo dge rgan as a discrete deity? The answer apparently lies in the Bon adoption of a tantric tradition similar to one used by the Buddhists. In this tantric system, common to both religions, octads of deities are more common than groups of nine.

The nature of the relationship of rTa rgo dge rgan with the btsan brotherhood of seven or eight members is not well delineated. It is ambiguous whether he is the father of the other members or simply the leader of the circle. In the oral legends, rTa rgo dge rgan is the undisputed master deity of the rTa rgo group, but his relationship with the others is hazy. rTa rgo dge rgan seems to exist in a mythological and doctrinal vacuum away from the activities of the btsan brotherhood. It may be that rTa rgo dge rgan is an atavistic deity who continued to exist in the regional mythology as a parallel form of the mountain after the introduction of the brotherhood.

The conventional leader of the rTa rgo mched bdun rol brgyad is known as Lha btsan 'bum me rje (the Great Lha btsan of One Hundred Thousand Fires). In the *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas bdag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs* by Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, he is described as the manifestation of rTa rgo as the protector of the northern continent (pp. 135,136). He is also described as the king of 100,000 yul lha and lha btsan. His body and face are white, and he wears a helmet and armor made of conch shell. He brandishes a bow and arrow and proudly wanders around the three spheres. In his right hand, he holds a divination arrow pointing towards the top of the world and in his left hand, he grasps a red snare of the btsan, which he uses to bind enemies and disturbances. He rides a superior pink and red horse with a golden saddle and a bridle decorated with jewels.

The text continues with a description of the other six members of the mched bdun in order of importance. The second member of the group is Ngo dmar lha btsan tshal thig rje (the Great Spotted Red Faced Lha btsan)(p. 136).[32] He is called the younger brother of Lha btsan 'bum me rje, described as having a red face and body, and wears armor (khrab) and a helmet (rmog) made of bse.[33] He holds an arrow with a red flag attached to it, reflecting the color of fire, and he displays a fierce visage. He rides the horse of the btsan and occasionally a snow lion. He is surrounded by an army of 100,000 btsan.

The third member of the rTa rgo brotherhood is Ge khod srin btsan dbyugs pa rje (p. 137). He possesses a dark body and wears golden armor and helmet. His attributes are an arrow with a flag (dar mda') and the stick of the srin (srin dbyugs), and he rides a chestnut-colored horse with white markings on the face of the srin po. He subdues enemies and disturbances. His retinue is composed of 100.000 btsan and srin. Next is the deity Gangs lung klu btsan cho dkar rje.[34] He has a white body, white helmet and armor, and is attired in the 'khor gsum chas ldan.[35] He carries an arrow with a reddish yellow flag attached to it and is mounted on a horse of the klu, which is brown with a

blue mane and white markings on its face. The fifth member of the brotherhood is Khri mun bdud btsan zur ra rje.[36] He is described as being dark red in color and wearing the same dress as Ge khod srin btsan dbyugs pa rje. He holds a spear with a flag attached (dar mdung),[37] rides the multicolored horse of the bdud and destroys his enemies. He is surrounded by an army of 100,000 red and black bdud.

The sixth member of the rTa rgo fraternity is dMu btsan rnga khur rje (the Great dMu btsan Who Carries a Drum)(p. 138). This deity has a dark brown body and wears armor and a helmet made of iron. In his left hand, he holds a rnga (ritual drum), and in his right hand, a gshang which renders enemies unconscious.[38] He rides the brown horse of the dmu and subdues enemies (dgra) and demons (gdon).[39] The seventh and final member of the mched bdun is Ma mo ma btsan U kyu rje (p.138). He is blue in color, attired in colorful clothes and silver armor and helmet, and decorated with the ornaments of the 'khor gsum rgyan ldan.[40] In his left hand he holds a me long, and in his right, a sack full of contagious diseases.[41] He rides a silver horse that spreads disease and is surrounded by 100,000 sman and btsan.

In the same text by Nyi ma bsTan 'dzin, rTa rgo is recorded as having four gnyan emanations instead of the usual eighth member of the brotherhood. One of these is Yul sa dkar po, ordinarily the eighth member. The deity Yul sa dkar po inhabits a peak in the rTa rgo range on the foot of which the Bon Se zhig monastery was founded. He is described as conch shell white in color and with a turquoise (colored) toupee bound with a dark blue ribbon (p. 139). He is attired in dark green clothing and decorated with leopard (gzig) and otter (sram) skin. The deity holds white prayer flags and rides a gray and white horse with a white mane and tiger-like stripes. The next gnyan emanation is Phyag gnyan gnyan dmar skyes bu btsan gyis chas (the Holy Man, the Red gNyan with the Gestures of the gNyan and the Dress of the bTsan)(p. 140).[42] He wears a long robe and holds a sword. He roams the mountains and valleys on a swift horse of the gnyan.

The third emanation is Phyag gnyan 'om rong,[43] a giant deity who wears a robe embellished with the 'khor gsum rgyan ldan. He holds a drawn bow and arrow to slay his enemies. He rides a swift pink and white horse. The fourth and final gnyan emanation is Phyag gnyan sgo bdag, who is described as the master of the life force of his enemies.[44] He has a dark red body, the dress of the btsan, and the ornaments of the 'khor gsum chas ldan. He rides on a rlung rta of the btsan and holds an arrow and spear.

A description of the rTa rgo mched bdun rol brgyad is also found in the older text, the *Lha chen rta sgo'i mchod bskang zhes bya ba zhugs* by rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan.[45] The names and descriptions of the rTa rgo mched bdun are given in the same order as in the text by Nyi ma bsTan 'dzin. The chief rTa rgo deity is called rTa rgo lha btsan 'bum kyi rje, who is described as having a resplendent white body and wears a helmet and armor made of conch as well as the 'khor gsum gzha' ris phub dang bcas (p. 180).[46] He is holding an arrow with a flag attached to it and rides on a yellow goose. His army consists of 100,000 lha btsan. He eradicates diseases caused by the lha btsan. The next deity is Ngo dmar lha btsan tshal thig rje (p. 181). His body reflects the color of fire, and

his armor and helmet are made of bse. Holding an arrow with a red flag attached, he rides a red horse.[47] His army consists of 100,000 btsan. He eradicates diseases caused by the btsan.

Ge khod lha btsan dbyugs pa rje is described as having a handsome purple body, armor and helmet of crystal, and wearing the 'khor gsum gzha' ris phub dang bcas (pp. 181,182). He rotates a colorful flag overhead and rides on a chestnut horse with a white spot on its forehead.[48] His army is comprised of 100,000 srin soldiers. He eradicates diseases caused by the srin. Gangs lung lha btsan cog (sic lcog) dkar rje (the Great Lha btsan of the Mountainous Country of the White Pinnacle) has a yellowish-red body, and a helmet and armor of gold, and wears the 'khor gsum gzha' ris phub dang bcas (p. 182). He holds an arrow with a flag attached to it and is mounted on a tan and white antelope. His army consists of 100,000 klu btsan and he has the ability to eradicate diseases manifested by the klu btsan.

Khri mun lha btsan zur ra rje has an angry, dark red face, armor and a helmet of conch, and is attired in the 'khor gsum gzha' ris phub dang bcas (p. 183). He rotates a banner in the ten directions and has an army of bdud btsan. He eradicates diseases precipitated by the bdud. dPa' bo'i lha btsan rnga khur rje (the Great Heroic Lha btsan who Carries the Drum) possesses a fierce dark brown face, his armor and helmet are made of copper, and he wears the 'khor gsum gzha' ris phub dang bcas. His army consists of 100,000 dmu and he eradicates diseases caused by the dmu. The seventh member of the mched bdun brotherhood is Ma mo lha btsan U kyu rje, who has a beautiful, resplendent, white face, wears armor and a helmet of iron, and is attired in the 'khor gsum gzha' ris phub dang bcas (p. 184). He holds a sack of silver, rides a red horse and has in his retinue 100,000 ma mo. He eradicates diseases caused by the ma mo.

The final member of the rTa rgo brotherhood Yul sa dkar po yul chas rje is described as the main assistant of the mched bdun (p. 185). He wears colorful clothes, a white turban and the 'khor gsum gzha' ris phub dang chas. He holds a khram shing and is mounted on a light gray horse.[49] He is the leader of a 100,000-strong army. Earlier in the text, a synoptic account of the mched bdun (p. 171) states that Lha btsan 'bum me rje is the chief among the limitless manifestations of brothers and sisters. The mched bdun are then described as having white bodies with red reflections, red clothing and turbans, and golden vases in their hands.

The rTa rgo mched bdun rol brgyad is dominated by the lha btsan, a class of deities formed from the interbreeding of the lha and btsan. The bellicose lha btsan are potentially allies or enemies of humans, depending on how humans interact with them. Their personality is in contrast to rTa rgo dge rgan, who is not a lha btsan nor a wrathful divinity. The origins of the cult of rTa rgo as a lha btsan cannot be traced back with certainty.[50] What is well established in the oral mythology is that the archetypal divinity of the mountain, rTa rgo dge rgan, is a classic yul lha deity in appearance and independent of the lha btsan.

The rTa rgo brotherhood, in addition to the lha btsan, includes several other composite forms of elemental spirits—the dmu btsan, bdud btsan, klu btsan and srin btsan. The btsan are the common denominator of these composite forms. This clearly corroborates the prevailing belief that the mched bdun belong to the btsan class. The priority in these composite forms is squarely on rTa rgo belonging to the btsan. The union of the btsan with other chthonic deities represents a Bon tradition of forging composite aboriginal divinities to create a superior or more powerful form, a symbol of Bon superseding earlier traditions. These composite forms are common in Bon po areas; for example, the chief yul lha of the village of bDe ba in sKyid grong county is called kLu btsan. These composite deities illustrate the mountain's hegemony over the full range of chthonic deities, together with the lha, dmu and bdud.[51] The entourages of the respective members of the fraternity serve to make this unmistakably clear.

The warrior lha btsan highlight the martial character of the mountain divinities. They are arrayed in full battle regalia including armor, helmets, banners and arms. rTa rgo, like gNyan chen thang lha, is the idealized warrior, invincible to any worldly incursion. The warrior mythology of the mountain developed alongside the martial culture of the region, with its numerous ancient forts and legendary associations with the military might of Zhang zhung. The ability of the brotherhood to subdue diseases arising from the elemental spirits is indicative of their apotropaism, another main feature of the cult of mountain deities. The Lha btsan, therefore, embody the offensive and the defensive postures of the warrior.

The inherent dualistic nature of the elemental spirits is shown in their aspect as disease-producing, trouble-causing beings, but they are also potential human allies. In the descriptions of the rTa rgo brotherhood, we see that the to the dangers posed by the elemental spirits is neutralized by rTa rgo in the guise of the very same elemental spirits. The co-existing divine and demonic natures of these beings are the basis for their ambivalence and unpredictability. This kind of dualism permeates Bon on many levels; for instance, one ancient belief states that at the time of a person's birth both demons and deities are born (lhan cig skyes pa'i lha dang bdud)(Karmay 1975: 195,196).

Images of the rTa rgo lha btsan are uncommon. There apparently is no complete painting of the entire brotherhood and existing images usually depict them as a single deity or the chief of the group by himself. A small wall mural of rTa rgo lha btsan 'bum me rje is found on the rear wall of the g.Yung drung bsam gtan gling monastery in the village of 'Om bu. He is portrayed as an angry mounted warrior, red in color, with three bulging eyes. In his left hand, he holds a shield and in his right hand, he brandishes a spear. His robes are multicolored and he is surrounded by a flaming aureole. On the left wall of the vestibule of the Se zhig monastery assembly hall a mural of Ngo dar lha btsan tshal thig rje, painted in 1995, depicts a fierce red man wearing blue and white robes. On his head he wears a golden helmet with small white and light blue flags attached to it (rmog dar 'phru). He is shown mounted on a red horse with an olive-colored mane and tail surrounded by a mass of fire.

In the rNying ma monastery in Nag chu city, a mask of rTa rgo hangs from a pillar in the front of the 'du khang. rTa rgo gzhi bdag is a protector of this monastery, but how this came to be is not understood. The rTa rgo mask is that of a generic btsan class deity and exhibits no peculiar iconographic details—the wrathful red figure bears its fangs and wears floral-shaped earrings and a skull diadem. The mask is wrapped in scarves and below it is the me long of the deity. It is interesting to see rTa rgo, a worldly protector (gzhi bdag), employed by a Buddhist monastery.


rTa rgo of the 'cham

mNyam med shes rab rgyal mtshan (1356-1415), the founder of sMan ri monastery in Thob rgyal, in gTsang province, had a vision of nine Bon protectors while in retreat. These protectors including rTa rgo were performing a magnificent dance which led to a 'cham dance being instituted (cf. Karmay 1983: 10,11). The dance is now performed at the sMan ri monastery in India under the supervision of sMan ri mkhan po. The protectors wear aprons decorated with wrathful visages flanked by skulls and swastikas. On the wide sleeves of the upper garment are vajras and skulls, and on the dancer's head is a wide-brimmed black hat surmounted by a golden arch and a plume of peacock feathers. In their right hands, the dancers grasp phur ba and in their left hands, skull cups.

A most interesting attribute of a member of the brotherhood is the stick of the srin (srin dbyugs) of Ge khod srin btsan dbyugs pa rje. The use of ritual sticks to empower practitioners and divinities with dominion over the spirits of the land is an extremely ancient practice. On the other hand, the inclusion of iron attributes and of a variety of metals in general alludes to the late Metal Age at the earliest. When the present form of the rTa rgo brotherhood iconography was first codified a wide range of attributes were conferred on it, representing cultural traditions of diverse chronological origins.

The Spirit-mediumship of rTa rgo rin po che

Like gNyan chen thang lha, rTa rgo was channelled by spirit-mediums (dpa' bo/bsnyen jo mo) for healing, exorcism, and to a lesser degree, for prognostication. One of the last spirit-mediums in the region is a 70-year-old nun named Sri thar sgrol ma. In the late 1950s, sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag watched her perform. Sri thar sgrol ma was born in central Tibet but has lived in the rTa rgo region since her childhood. She took initiation as a spirit-medium about seven years before the Communist invasion of 1950.

After the Communist takeover in 1959, she was imprisoned for one year because of

her activities as a medium, which were seen as being antagonistic to the new social order. For the next 25 years, she had to undergo indoctrination. The stress of her ordeal and the recriminations attendant upon resuming practice have forced her to forswear her work as a spirit-medium. During a pilgrimage to mTsho ma pham, she threw the me long which she had used during her seances into the lake, effectively cutting herself off from the deities.[52]

According to Sri thar grol ma, most, if not all, other mediums are now dead, and she is not aware of any still practicing openly. However, there are occasional cases of rTa rgo deities taking possession of young people against their will. Of all the rTa rgo deities, Gangs lung lha btsan was the most popular among the spirit-mediums. rTa rgo gde rgan, like gNyan chen thang lha, never visited the mediums. Sri thar sgrol ma reported that there were 13 spiritual lineages of dpa' bo in the Bon tradition called Lha rgyud bcu gsum, of which she belonged to the lineage called bDe glag bstan 'dzin chos sgron. In addition to mTsho ma pham, tutelary deities of the mediums included the tshe ring mched lnga and rDo rje g.yu sgron ma. Three guardian deities of the region's mediums were mkha' 'gro ma (dakinis) who resided in the cliffs on the west side of the Gangs ti se skor lam. Their names were dKar mo, Lis yang and Grin dkar.

Sri thar sgrol ma claims to have owned or to have been empowered by 13 deities of the sa bdag class, including the 10 deities known as rTsa ba'i lha bcu (the Ten Root Gods) who reside at the Gangs ri mtsho gsum (Gangs ti se, mTsho ma pham and sPos ri ngad ldan).[53] The father of the rTsa ba'i lha bcu is Yab 'khon lo sdom pa and their mother is Yum ma pham g.yu mtsho. The other three mkha' 'gro ma sisters, in order of birth, are rGyangs grags mkha' 'gro ma, Ri zhing mkha' 'gro ma, Chu gar mkha' 'gro ma. Additionally, Sri thar sgrol ma claimed to be a reincarnation of Lha mo 'brug mo, her ancestral deity. 'Brug mo in turn was the dakini rGyang grags in a previous life. From this account of the dpa' bo tradition we see that a medium has both tutelary deities and empowering deities. The former never take possession of the medium while the latter help the medium during a trance to carry out their work. We also see that the female mediums tend to favor female deities. It is important to note that Dang ra g.yu mtsho was never the object of trance, although she was a tutelary deity of certain lineages of the Lha rgyud bcu gsum. Evidently, the tradition of mediums at rTa rgo was a complex one involving many different kinds of deities and lineages of practitioners. All three of the Dyads of the Byang thang were interconnected through this tradition as we have seen.

Sri thar sgrol ma would don a rig lnga and to hold a sil snyan in her left hand and a damaru in her right hand.[54] The room would be filled with incense as part of the ritual. After being possessed by one of her 13 deities, she was invested with magical powers and was able to remove pollution (grib) that was causing serious diseases, such as cancer. When the pollution was expelled from the patient it resembled a black worm.

A study of dpa' bo carried out by Berglie found that many deities of Dang ra and

rTa rgo were mentioned during seances.[55] Ta rgo rin po che was found to be important to the dpa' bo, who had no first hand experience of the mountain, and was invoked before the Thang lha and gNam ra groups (Berglie 1980: 41,42). The topmost deity was rTa rgo dge rgan chos rgyal, whose only role was to lead his gods to the altar during the seance. The most active deity in the trance was rTa rgo ngo dmar mtshal mig, who one informant called the bka' blon (high ranking minister) of dGe rgan mchor po. This deity is impervious to fire, supercilious to supplicants and misogynistic. rTa rgo bshan pa bdun (the Seven Butchers of rTa rgo) an evil brotherhood, had to be warded off at the start of each seance. The mediums were possessed by helping deities with zoomorphic forms and worked in conjunction with rTa rgo. Three specific ones are mentioned in the study. Zangs spyong dmar po (the Red Copper Wolf) has a copper collar and helps to cure possession by btsan class demons. Dred nag sog dkar (the Black Bear with the White Shoulders) has blue skin and helps to cure diseases caused by the klu and sa bdag. Zibs rogs 'ug gu mchu ring (the Sucking Helper, the Owl with the Long Beak) has an iron beak and cures fainting and vertigo.

Dang ra was invoked after rTa rgo and was called Dang ra las kyi dbang mo and Dang ra las btsan dbang mo. Her daughter, Dang chung g.yu yi zur phud, was also invoked along with a minor group of female deities the mKha' 'gro shes rab brgyad cu (the Eighty Prajna Dakinis). Berglie's study demonstrates the significance of rTa rgo to the dpa' bo living far afield from the holy mountain and underscore the widespread importance of the mountain in ancient times. The deities that the dpa' bo in Berglie's study called dGe rgan chos rgyal and dGe rgan mchor po can be no other than rTa rgo dge rgan, the powerful and aloof chief deity of the range who never deigns to be channelled by mediums.[56]

End Notes:

1. Reference to rTa rgo as the soul rock of Bon, oral sources not withstanding, is found in *Srid pa'i lha ri mtsho gnas chen bdag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs*. Its colophon reads: "As requested by Drang srong g.yung btsan chen mo, who deemed it necessary to offer this praise, sGo rigs sgam bla sman ri mkhan zur pa Nyi ri shel bzhin zur wer wrote it according to his experience, without exaggeration, at mThong gsal nyi 'og khang." The author refers to Nyi ma bstan 'dzin (his name in the colophon appears in the Zhang zhung language), the 22nd abbot of sMan ri monastery. The patron of this work was apparently a woman of high rank. This work is now part of a collection of ritual texts pertinent to *rTa rgo and Dang ra known as rTa rgo dang ra tshogs dang bskang ba* (or *rTa dang tshogs bskang* for short). This collection consists of 149 folios (298 pages, as designated in the text), printed on both sides in dbu med script. The text by Nyi ma bstan 'dzin now under consideration is situated between pp. 119-146 of the collection.

   In the mid-1980s, the religious leaders of the rTa rgo and Dang ra region began to collect various texts, including mdos rituals, gsol kha and bskang ba, in order to reproduce these rare works, which had survived the Cultural Revolution. Circa 1990, the reproduction of the collection in Lhasa was completed. Unfortunately, only a few copies were made and the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* remains relatively rare. In conjunction with the present survey, a complete copy was procured at Dang ra g.yu mtsho in 1995. This became the first copy to reach the subcontinent. rGyal ba sMan ri mkhan po has authorized the Dolanji Tibetan Bon Monastic Centre to publish the collection in India, which will help to preserve it.
2. This reference to the Dyad as the protectors of Zhang zhung is located in a text by sMan ri mkhan po Nyi ma bstan 'dzin entitled *Ka bstod thugs dam dgyes bskang bzhugs* (Copious Praises, Prayers and Wishes for the Joyous Fulfillment), see p. 147. This bskang ba text is part of the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* collection, pp. 147-151.
3. The spelling of rTa rgo, like many other aspects of the mountain, is subject to interpretation and is anything but standardized. The spelling used in this work is the one preferred by sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag. In the language of Zhang zhung, rta rgo means snow mountain. Its closest synonym in the Zhang zhung language is snil rang/rnil rwang, which also means snow mountain (Haarh 1968: 35,40). In certain lower and middle Kinnauri dialects, rang is still an important term for mountain but as of yet no evidence for the contemporary usage of rta rgo has been found. The difference between snil rang/rnil rang and rta rgo is that the former is a generic term for snow mountain while the latter appears to be a term to qualify snow mountains of exceptional importance or sanctity. It has not been determined which half of the word means snow and which half denotes mountain, if indeed it derived its sense in this way.

   The name rTa rgo is sometimes used as a synonym for Gangs ti se, states sLob dpon. For example, in the Ma rgyud literature the quincunx of khyung-faced dakinis called rTa rgo ma pang mkha' 'gro khyung gdong lnga are those that reside at Gangs ti se. rTa rgo as a name of Gangs ti se may also be found in the *Ge khod gsang ba drag chen* (Norbu 1995: 42). In the

Gangs ti se dkar chag, Gangs ti se is called Shel rgyung rta rgo (Victorious Snowy Mountain) in the language of Zhang zhung (Norbu and Prats: 109).

The mountain rTa rgo is often spelt rTa sgo by both the Bon po and Buddhists and this is the spelling found in most of the texts devoted to him. However, according to sLob dpon bstan 'dzin rnam dag, this orthography is objectionable because of the etymological confusion it engenders. rTa sgo, which in Tibetan literally means 'horse gate' or, by extension 'large entrance way', is sometimes said to refer to a paradisiacal or magical gateway by Buddhists. A perusal of Bon and Buddhist literature that relates to the holy mountain, however, has uncovered absolutely no basis for this etymological and mythological attribution. Confusingly, a number of other variant spellings for rTa rgo can be found. These include sTag sgo (Tiger Door), bTar sgo, and rTa mgo (Horse Head), none of which are substantiated in Bon history and tradition. Some of the best evidence for the correct spelling of rTa rgo is phonetic. Throughout the Byang thang, the name is pronounced with the superscribed r of the second syllable, a peculiarity found more often in the second syllable of words with a superscribed m or b. This standard pronunciation fits the older spelling much better than it does the more common spelling, rTa sgo. In the spoken language it seems that the original phonetics were retained while the orthography was modified.

4. The use of Ta rgo rin po che in this work reflects the honorific usage found in the region.
5. rNam par rgyal ba (the Fully Victorious One)(see illustration in text) is blue in color and has a disdainful expression. He is depicted with his right hand held overhead and his left hand touching the ground, symbolizing his mastery over all the beings in the universe.

   rNam par rgyal ba is flanked by pairs of chu srin, dragons consuming klu and lions eating Brahmans. A khyung flies overhead with a snake in its mouth. These mighty animals symbolize the power the deity's plenipotentiaries possess, which rTa rgo uses to subjugate evil forces. In the highly informative introduction to Bon, *The Bon Religion of Tibet*, this deity is described as having his right palm turned upwards in the gesture of vanquishing, and his left hand resting on his knee. rNam par rgyal ba sits in a cross-legged position and his body shines forth a multicolored radiance. His fierce smile signifies power. He is surrounded by four fierce bluish-black deities, each with nine heads, 18 arms and four legs. These heads include those of a khyung, lion, makara, tiger, leopard, snake and yak. Each of the 18 arms is holding a weapon. See Kvaerne 1995: pp. 33,34.
6. The bder gshegs stong rtsa are 1,000 Bon buddha figures. They are similar in function to their Buddhist counterparts, the Sangs rgyas stong sku.
7. The mGon po rnam gsum or mGon po gsum, consisting of Ge khod, A ti mu wer and Ku byi mang ke, are three of the most important protectors in the Bon religion. According to sMan ri mkhan po, the three were originally deities of Zhang zhung, hence their Zhang zhung language names. In the Tibetan language, A ti = sangs rgyas, mu = klong and wer = rgyal. Thus, the deity's name translates as The Enlightened King of Space. In the Tibetan language, Ku byi mang ke translates as rDzu 'phrul dpag med (Boundless Miracles) and Ge khod translates as bDud 'dul (Subduer of the bDud).

8. For another Bon account of the epic struggle between the gods and demons, see Karmay 1975, pp. 203-207.
9. The text, entitled *Lha chen rTa sgo'i mchod bskang zhes bya ba bzhugs* (Offerings which are Carried Out for the Satisfaction of the Great God rTa rgo), was written by rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan. Its colophon reads: "This ritual appeasement of Lha chen rta sgo was written by rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan in pursuance of a vision of the gNas bdag lcam dral, who joyfully and respectfully welcomed him and saw him home. It was composed at rDzu 'phrul phug and given to Khri dpon lha mo khon." Perhaps the recipient of the text was a local ruler? The name indicates that the recipient was a female. This text is part of the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* and is situated between pp. 167-188 of the collection.
10. The five sense offerings are visual (gzugs), auditory (sgra), olfactory (dri), taste (ro) and tactile (reg).
11. The text *gNas bdag lcam dral gyi gzer bu'i cha lag kyi spyi dgos phrin bcol bas pa myur sgrub bzhugs* was written by mChog sprul bstan 'dzin tshul khrims, who probably was a sprul sku of g.Yu bun monastery. It is part of the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* and is situated between pp. 249-266 of the collection.
12. For background on the mythology of Shen rtsa rgyal gangs ri, see Ma 1991, pp. 233,234.
13. This information was obtained in December 1995 in an interview with Ted H. Worcester, who has lived and worked in close association with people from gZhung ru for over 25 years.
14. The text under consideration is a handwritten manuscript simply entitled *rTa sgo'i gsol mchod bzhugs so*. This text, which runs about four pages, is used in the worship of rTa rgo rin po che in the village of sGrol thang, located in the dMu of upper gTsang. It was obtained on a field survey.
15. There are other examples of the Buddhist appropriation of gsol kha dedicated to rTa rgo. One minor text contains Buddhist style visualizations (mgon rtogs) and transformations (stong sbyang). This is found in a hand written manuscript entitled *rTa mgo dwangs ra gsol mchod bzhugs so* which is about two pages in length. It was kindly made available by Tashi Tsering, a research officer at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. He obtained it about twenty years ago in association with research he did on the sacred geography of the Byang thang. Another handwritten manuscript, six folios in length, entitled *rTa sgo'i gsol mchod* contains a Buddhist tantric sadhana. It is used in the gNam mtsho region by those who have rTa rgo rin po che as their clan deity.
16. Like gNyan chen thang lha, the region around rTa rgo and Dang ra g.yu mtsho is prone to earthquakes. In 1921, 1924 and 1951, there were earthquakes in the gNyan chen thang lha region, and in 1940 and 1952 they occurred east of gNam mtsho. In 1935 and 1957, there were earthquakes in Nag tshang; in 1938, west of Dang ra; and in 1953, north of Dang ra. For a list of 20th century earthquakes in Tibet, see Tarthang Tulku 1986, p. 39. In June, 1986, an earthquake of a 6.5 magnitude on the Richter scale hit Dang ra, causing severe structural damage in the largest village of the region, 'Om bu. See Ma 1991, pp. 52,53.

17. The continuity of the tradition of the *axis mundi* from the prehistoric to the historic period is indicated by a comparative study of mythology. Models of sacred mountains first appeared in China in the late Warring States period and Han dynasty (Allen: 99). In a chapter of the 1st century B.C.E. text *The Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shan hai ching)*, the earthly paradise of the K'un-lun replicates the heavenly paradise (Birrel: 183,234,235). The K'un-lun is described as the epicenter of the universe, the place where heaven and earth meet in perfect equipoise, and where the gods descend from the sky to earth. Moreover, the K'un-lun has a sky-ladder in the form of a giant tree where humans and gods can commune, guarded by a fierce array of mythical beasts which exhibit polycephality. The mytheme of the sacred mountain is an elementary part of human culture. Universally, a situation whereby the universe is allowed to reside in spatial and conceptual chaos is avoided. On the Byang thang it is likely that the vertically-oriented cosmos owes its very existence to the presence of mountains rising out of the expansive plains. The natural convergence of the elements and ecological processes at lofty mountains such as rTa rgo must have facilitated the development of the indigenous cosmologies.

    As the mythographer M. Eliade points out, in archaic religions a sacred mountain or giant tree is frequently found at the center of the world, representing the meeting place of heaven and earth and the source of the universe. This sacred world mountain is often associated with a tripartite cosmos. As such, we see both gNyan chen thang lha and rTa rgo rin po che fitting into this world-wide mythological pattern. The verticality of sacred mountains is countered by the planar or horizontal dimension which, in world mythology, is often envisioned as the four quarters or cardinal directions. At the Dyads the four dgra lha and 'phrin las aspects best typify this dimension. rTa rgo, as the omphalos of a large chunk of the Byang thang, signifies the intersection of the vertical and horizontal axes. These epicenters and zones of directional convergence are quintessential power objects and sacred geographical emporiums. Essentially, they symbolize cosmic harmony, perfection of place, and, by mimesis, human well-being.

18. This idyllic description of the base of the holy mountain is founded in reality, for in the bed of the rTa rgo gtsang po tamarisk ('om bu) grows in relative abundance, as does btar bu (a shrub which produces a small red edible berry which ripens in September). This vegetation is part of a relict shrub forest that was widely distributed over the Byang thang thousands of years ago. Another red berry growing at the base of rTa rgo, although less commonly than btar bu, is ra tsha. In addition to these shrubs, there are a number of medicinal plants that thrive in the area.

19. Visual representations of rTa rgo dge rgan are exceedingly rare (see illustration in text). They were occasionally found on thang ka and in monastic murals in the region until these were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. In 1995, an image of rTa rgo dge rgan reappeared on the walls of the new assembly hall of Se zhig dgon pa, thanks to three highly skilled painters from sTeng chen. The mural under consideration is found in the vestibule of the 'du khang (a common placement for mountain protectors). It exhibits the iconographic

features of the quintessential Bon yul lha. He is portrayed as a young handsome and regal man with white skin and a thin mustache. He wears a pacific but resolute expression, and is attired in multicolored robes, boots and the white hat of Bon (Bon dkar zhwa) trimmed with red and blue piping. In his right hand, he holds a golden gshang and in his left, a golden phur ba. He is mounted on a tawny unicorn (bse ru rwa gcig) and is shown soaring above the mountain and lake in a swirling mass of clouds.

20. This description, from a handwritten incense hymn entitled *rTa sgo dwangs ra gsol mchod bzhugs so*, was generously made available for inspection by Tashi Tsering of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. It is about two pages in length.
21. Sad in the Zhum tsho dialect of central Khu nu is the equivalent of lha, shu and devata, three other words used in Khu nu which broadly translate as deity. The term sad, however, is most commonly applied to the yul lha and their circles of deities in Zhum tsho.
22. This information on the nor lha and btsan g.yag was gathered by Ted H.Worcester from informants of the gZhung ru region.
23. An early Bon po funerary ritual found in the Tun-huang manuscripts proscribes the sacrifice of the g.yen (black horse, completely black horse, piebald horse, maroon yak, auburn yak, white yak, ash-blond yak, auburn mdzo and mdzo with striped back) in the funerals of high-ranking people. This ban extended to their hair and even to the containment of the animals. Evidently, in royal funerals the proscription on the sacrifice of the g.yen (probably equivalent to the chen rtags/great emblems) was irrelevant. See Lalou, pp. 2-4,17-19.
24. This text, according to its colophon, was compiled by bsTan 'dzin tshul khrims, the current abbot of Dang ra g.Yu bun monastery. This is the first text of the *rTa dang tshogs bskang*, situated between pp. 1-81. Presumably, it was originally compiled by a predecessor of the current g.Yu bun sprul sku. This was the only text of the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* to reach the Bon monastic centers on the subcontinent prior to 1995.
25. In reference to Mount Kailas, Professor Tucci thought that concepts derived from elementary philosophical ideas, representing a middle way between Saivism and rDzogs chen, were transformed into symbols. The means (thabs) leading to salvation came to be symbolically identified with the father mountain, while the mother lake (Manasarover) became a symbol of transcendent wisdom (ye shes). He saw this gnostic interpretation as being superimposed on the earlier myths of the father mountain and mother lake. See Tucci 1980, p. 219.
26. This mythopoeia is a long and convoluted process, probably beginning with the introduction of assimilated Bon before the 11th century. Two major historical events which must have hastened this trend were the 17th century dGe lugs pa subjugation of the region and the recent Communist invasion and its ideology. The latter has had a far more pervasive role in degrading indigenous culture. Less then 125 years ago, Nain Singh came to know of the cosmogonic Dyad during a very brief stay, while during the expeditions undertaken for this book it was more difficult to obtain the same material. More often the explanation of the origins of the universe turned up concepts such as beginningless time, emptiness, primordial buddhas, space and karma.
27. The text entitled *Ri mtsho gnas dag lcam dral gyi gzer bu'i kyi cha lag bstan 'gro'i dpal byin bzhugs*

is part of the *rTa dang tshogs bskang*. It is situated between pp. 195-248. Its colophon reads: "I, sMan ri mkhan zur pa (retired Abbot of sMan ri) Nyi ri shel bzhin zur wer, a descendant of the sKam zhig family whose founder was Lha bon tho le dkar po of Grup chen sgo rgyal skam zhig, wrote this work at Phyug 'tsho dgon pa in the Year of the Sheep in the early part of the Horse month."

28. Both sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag and rGyal ba sman ri mkhan po encouraged the author to complete this research primarily because of a threat of the heritage of the region being irreparably lost.
29. The historically controversial gter ma texts notwithstanding, the earliest text on rTa rgo and Dang ra is one written by rMa ston srol 'dzin, who was born in 1092 and visited the region. It is now part of the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* and is entitled *Dang ra lcam dral gyi bskang ba zhes bya ba bzhugs* (Rites Carried Out for the Satisfaction of the Sisters and Brother of Dang ra). See pp. 151-165.
30. Nain Singh mentioned in his report that the Shyalchi Kang Jang mountains to the west of Dang ra g.yu mtsho are the offspring of the Dyad. See Nain Singh pp. 171. This reference can be to no other than Zhal gangs 'jam.
31. *rTa dang gnyis kyis bskul ba bzhugs*, a manuscript attributed to Hri pa Gyer med, was written at Dang ra g.Yu bun monastery according to its colophon. The text, an invocation to rTa rgo and Dang ra, consists of a single folio written in dbu med script. For generations, it was in the family of Bya dur bsod nams bzang po, and was carefully preserved and reverently recited in their Chos khang. In 1959, when Bya dur bsod nams bzang po fled Tibet, it was one of the few family scriptures he managed to take with him. I am indebted to him for making a copy of the text accessible. The names of the nine rTa rgo deities in the work are as follows: 1) gTso bo lha btsan 'bum me rje; 2) Ngo dmar lha btsan 'tshal thig rje; 3) Gyer khod lha btsan dbyug pa rje; 4) Gangs lung lha btsan chog dkar rje; 5) Khri mun lha btsan zur ra rje; 6) dPa' bo'i lha btsan rnga khur rje; 7) Ma mo'i lha btsan mu gyu rje; 8) Yul sa dkar po yul chas rje; and 9) dGe rgan mthu bo che.
32. The meaning of tshal in this context is not garden/grove but most likely vermilion, a bright red earth and more correctly spelled mtshal.
33. According to sMan ri mkhan po, bse refers to specially-hardened animal hide used in ancient times to make armor and helmets. The hide of the rhinoceros (bse ru) was considered most superior for this purpose.
34. Cho, in this context, evidently refers to the Tibetan name for dice.
35. The 'khor gsum chas ldan apparently refers to royal robes. The 'khor gsum here may be a symbolic reference to the full compass of beings living in the srid gsum, reflecting the sovereignty and uncontested power of the wearer of the garment.
36. According to some Bon scholars, zur ra denotes a sentinel.
37. It was a common practice to hoist a spear with a flag (dar mdung) in front of every dwelling, a custom that developed from military tradition and acquired religious overtones (Gedun Choephel: 31).

38. Which hands the ritual instruments are placed in is not specified in the text, but the drum in the right hand and the gshang in the left is the traditional placement.
39. Usually gdon is translated as 'evil spirit' or as 'disturbances' connected to the psycho-energetic dimension of the individual. See, for example, Norbu 1995, pp. 247,256; Das, p. 663.
40. According to sMan ri mkhan po, the 'khor gsum rgyan ldan refers to circular designs or roundels on robes.
41. Which hands the sack and me long are held in is not specified in the text, but the placement given is one that conforms to iconographic tradition.
42. The deity gNyan dmar (his abbreviated common name) resides on the southeast side of Dang ra several miles east of the lake. Reportedly, his shrine consists of large stones.
43. 'Om rong (his common abbreviated name) resides in the settlement of the same name, located at the mouth of a defile formed by the rTa rgo gtsang po river just before it turns northward and debouches on to the plain that abuts the rTa rgo range. According to local sources, 'Om rong derives his name from tamarisk ('om bu) which grows in abundance downstream of the shrine and 'Om rong settlement. The deity 'Om rong is said to be the special yul lha protector of this precious resource and the unique ecosystem it helps to form. Reportedly, his shrine, a huge boulder, has the magical print of a tiger's paw on it. The tiger features in a number of traditions associated with the Divine Dyads, although it is not now found on the Byang thang. All indications are it is an ancient part of Tibetan culture. For example, in the Imperial period white tigers were painted on the tombs of warriors (Richardson 1987: 13).
44. The deity sGo bdag (his common abbreviated name) resides on the rTa rgo 'phrang, the precipitous flanks of the rTa rgo range that plunge into the south side of Dang ra g.yu mtsho.
45. A brief description of the rTa rgo mched bdun is provided in the short incense text *rTa sgo dwangs ra gsol mchod bzhugs so*. This text is considered less authoritative because of its brevity, lack of authorship and inaccuracies. Inside the divine mountain palace of rTa rgo resides the powerful protector of the north gTso bo lha btsan 'bum me rje. He is mounted on a bluish-white horse and his armor and helmet are made of conch. In his right hand, he holds a spear with a flag attached, and with his left hand he grasps the reins of his horse. Ngo mtshar lha btsan mtshal thig mar (The Red Lha btsan with the Handsome Face and Vermilion-colored Spots) has armor and a helmet of gold. In his right hand, he holds a flag and, in his left hand, the reins.

    sKye rgod lha btsan dbyung ba smug (The Purple Holy Wild Man Lha btsan, the Expeller) is described as having golden armor and helmet and is mounted on a gray horse with white legs. He is holding a flag and the reins. Gangs lung lha btsan mchog dkar mar (the Excellent Red and White Lha btsan of the Mountain Valley) wears a golden helmet and armor and has the reins of his mount in one hand and a spear with a flag in the other. Khri smug lha btsan zu ra dmar carries a flag, wears conch armor and helmet and rides a grayish horse with white mouth. dPa' bo'i lha btsan rnga phur smug (the Heroic Purple Lha btsan

with the Drum and Dagger) has armor and helmet made of copper and the color of his horse is described as gro bo g.yur sngogs. He is depicted as carrying a drum and a gshang. The last member of the rTa rgo brotherhood is Ma mo'i lha btsan U kyu dkar. He has armor and a helmet made of iron, a sack of silver in his hand, and rides a gray horse with red markings.

46. According to sMan ri mkhan po, 'khor gsum gzha' ris phub dang bcas means 'encircled by three rainbows'.
47. Which animal the deity is mounted on is not explicit in the text.
48. Which animal the deity is mounted on is not explicit in the text.
49. Which animal the deity is mounted on is not explicit in the text.
50. For a discussion on the btsan and btsan po see Gibson.
51. In early Indian Epic literature the mountain known as Gandhamadana, which is sometimes identified with Mount Kailas, is likewise the home of elemental beings. Gandhamadana is depicted as the mountain of Kubera, the ruler of the yaksas, guhyakas and nagas. See Staal, p. 277.
52. mTsho ma pham was one of the tutelary deities of the mediums of the rTa rgo region.
53. sPos ri ngad ldan is a mountain in the vicinity of Mount Kailas which is important to Bon history. It was a Bon stronghold right up to the Communist period.
54. The damaru is a hand-held hourglass-shaped drum. The sil snyan is a cymbal similar to the gshang, but smaller in size. It is very popular in Bon ritual practices.
55. This study of the dpa' bo was conducted by P.A. Berglie. See Berglie 1980.
56. The study goes on to compare the Shamanism of north Asia where helping and tutelary deities are also found. The spirit-mediumship of the Byang thang was possibly influenced by analogous inner and north Asian traditions.



West Pyramidal Nook



West Chamber of Brag ching gur phug



East Pyamidal Nook



East Chamber of Brag ching gur phug



Dang ra rgyal mo

CHAPTER SEVEN

Dang ra g.yu mtsho in History, Religion, and Mythology

Introduction

rTa rgo rin po che is the mate of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, the large lake lying to the north of the range. Dang ra is the largest and most holy lake in the central Byang thang and shares many common traits with gNam mtsho as goddess lakes and srid pa'i deities. The main differences between them is their geographical and onomastic variability. In the Bon tradition, Dang ra g.yu mtsho and gNam mtsho, two of the three major lake goddesses of the Byang thang, emerged from the same parent mythology. The historical and cultural parallels between them are striking.

Dang ra g.yu mtsho is also called Dang ra mtsho mo and Dang ra rgyal mo. When the divinity of the lake is specifically referred to she is often called Dang ra las kyi dbang mo (Dang ra, She with the Power of Destiny). The dpa' bo of southern Tibet also know her as Dang ra las btsan dbang mo (Berglie 1980: 41). In the Dang ra region, Dang ra g.yu mtsho and Dang ra rgyal mo are the names most frequently used. Locally, she is also called Dang ra las kyi dbang mo che and Dang ra phyug mtsho. These are names found in the texts devoted to her. Another of her local names, used especially in conjunction with her generative functions, is Dang ra rgyal yum.

Dang ra is also spelled Dwang ra or Dwangs ra. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, Dang ra is a Zhang zhung word meaning ocean (rgya mtsho) which has been extended to the lake in recognition of its holiness.[1] In a ritual text belonging to the Me ri cycle, written by Abbot Nyi ma bstan 'dzin (Norbu 1995: 167,168,274), an epic struggle between the gods and demons is related and the Zhang zhung expression "dang ra hib chu" (to swallow the ocean in one sip) is found. In Tibet, the word Dang ra is confined to Bon texts and to denote the lake. However, according to Tshe ring rdo rje, a linguistic expert of the Zhang zhung branch of languages, the word Dang ra or Da ha is found in certain Thakali and Tamangi dialects to denote an ocean or lake.[2]

The earliest literary reference to Dang ra might be found in the *Old Tibet Chronicle*, where it is called Dang ko.[3] In verses 50 to 55, there are veiled allegorical references to the general Zu rtse's expansion of the sPu rgyal kingdom in which lake Dang ko is politically significant. In verses 54 and 55 a change in the balance of power from mTsho ma pham to Dang ko is referred to, and geese and ducks are used to represent this shift. These two verses read:

From the shores of Manasarover lake,
The geese and ducks fled.
They fled to Dang ko lake.
Today, if one looks at tomorrow,
(At) the Divine Lake Dang ko
The heat is not bad for the geese and ducks—
If the heat was bad for the geese and ducks,
They would be seduced by lake Manasarover.

Dang ra shares a phonetic affinity with Dang ko; more than any other important lake in Tibet, it is a candidate for Dang ko. Because of the prominence of Dang ra in early Tibetan history and this phonetic similarity, Dang ko should tentatively be identified with Dang ra g.yu mtsho.

The Protectress

In the oral tradition, Dang ra rgyal mo is the primary guardian of the fertility of the land and livestock. Despite there being multitudinous Bon and Buddhist goddesses, none is so cherished as a protectress of the basic constructs of life in the central portion of Byang thang than Dang ra rgyal mo. The health of livestock, amount of rainfall, and the prosperity of human communities are believed to be directly dependent on the lake goddess and her disbursements of life-giving energies. Dang ra rgyal mo, if provoked or transgressed upon, can be a terrible and implacable foe. Fortunately, her basic personality is characterized by contentment and temperance. The age-old function of Dang ra as a protectress remains the foundation of her identity.

Dang ra rgyal mo is a sman mo queen, the ruler of countless other sman and elemental beings, such as the klu mo. Local residents believe the plethora of elemental spirits inhabiting the region either find shelter in the lake or originate from it. As such, Dang ra is the perfect counterpart to rTa rgo. The essential meaning of sman mo is benefactress. The etymology of sman mo, as typified in the functions of the goddess as provider and nurturer, is now largely subsumed under her protective function as a Bon skyong. However, the goddess as benefactress must also have been related to her ancestral function. As the archetypal mother in mythology, she is the ultimate ancestor of all beings natural and supernatural.

How Dang ra is related to the srin, and 'dre is not clarified in the *rTa dang tshogs bskang*. We can assume that, like the sGrol ma phug at bKra shis do chung, the caves along the shores of Dang ra were used in ancient times to propitiate such elemental deities. A remnant of the 'dre and srin cults is found in a cave complex called Byon Brag dkar, which, like Dang ra g.yu mtsho, is one of the 37 Bon 'du gnas.

For natives, Dang ra teems with fantastic beings.[4] Aside from sheltering more threatening elemental spirits, Dang ra g.yu mtsho, like gNam mtsho, is said to be the

home of giant fish and aquatic sheep. Dragons are also reputed to visit the lake from time to time,[5] and a kind of sea monster is believed to live in it, which deters people from indiscriminately entering the water. This creature is said to devour cattle that haplessly wade in for a drink. Fear of strange creatures confines pilgrims to the designated bathing places on the cardinal directions of the lake.

Other Facets of the Goddess' Personality

As we have seen, Tibetans believe that all beings, incarnate and disincarnate, have a srog and bla which are related to its consciousness (rnam shes). In beings with a corporeal dimension, these faculties are seated inside the body as essential constituents of the being's make-up. These faculties are contained in the subtle channels (dbu rtsa) of the organism, which have as their physical base, blood, semen, bones and other fundamental tissue elements. In incorporeal beings, the subtle channels are also the receptacles of the bla, srog and the interrelated rnam shes, but there is no physical analogue to these subtle energies. Deities such as Dang ra rgyal mo fall somewhere between these two categories. When the water of the lake itself is seen as her incarnation, it serves the same function as the tissue elements of an organism. When the goddess is conceived as a non-material existence her bla, srog and rnam shes reside in non-tangible spheres.

Deities are often created in the image of humans, the Divine Dyads being no exception. Like people, the goddess has the capacity for constructive and destructive activities and has similar emotional reactions. While the unworldly deities often stand alone in austere aloofness and self-sufficiency, Dang ra and rTa rgo, like gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha, are married couples with families, friends and servants. The Dyads reflect the dynamics of human society, specifically of Byang thang society. Dang ra is the archetypal mother figure and, on the socio-political level, an image of the perfect queen or ruler. It is precisely because of their human similitude that the Divine Dyads are close to the people, for cognitively and emotionally it is easier to respond to something familiar.

In popular folk tradition, the physical lake embodies Dang ra rgyal mo and they are essentially one. The head of the goddess rests against the rTa rgo range to the south. According to one old sngags pa in the village of Pul sum on the west side of the lake, the shrine of sGo bdag a gnyan servant of rTa rgo, is also called mGo thag (Head Rope), which refers to the crown of the goddess' head. It is at this sacred place that the mystical union between the Dang ra and rTa rgo is said to occur. Local residents maintain that the goddess Dang ra rgyal mo is standing on her left leg and that her right leg is folded tightly into her pelvis. The 35-kilometer-long latitudinal bend in the lake, located on the its east side, is said to represent a bend in her right leg. The parallel with the yogini pose rDo rje phag mo strikes at gNam mtsho is clear. This tradition of anthropomorphizing the lake is apparently aboriginal and is not covered in the *rTa dang tshogs bskang*.

Few of the goddess' anatomical features are specified at Dang ra. The two most

important and well-known topographical features which correlate to the goddess' anatomy are her two eyes. The left, a small circular lake on the west side of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, was originally called either Khri tse khrus mtsho (the Bathing Lake of the Mind) or Khri seg khrus mtsho (the Bathing Lake of the Srog).[6] This lake is an important gnas chen on the circumambulatory trail around the lake and is marked by numerous cairns. As the eye of the goddess, it is thought to be an excellent place to petition Dang ra rgyal mo and to make ritual ablutions. The right eye of the goddess is another small, holy lake called Nag mer khrus mtsho (The Black Filled-to-the-Brim Bathing Lake) situated on the slopes of Ngo dmar lha btsan tshal thig rje. It is also a place of pilgrimage.

The sanctity of these two lakes is based on their proximity to Dang ra rgyal mo's power and sentience and their representation as her eyes. In Tibetan belief, the eye is the site of the deepest psycho-spiritual energies, and liberation through sight (mthong grol) is an important means to enlightenment in Tibetan culture. Thang ka painters paint the eyes of sacred images last and, until they are painted, the image does not take on the identity of the deity it represents.

Rather than being one with the goddess, Dang ra g.yu mtsho can also be the manifestation or residence of the goddess. After the adoption of assimilated Bon beliefs of incarnation and emanation, the identity of the water was replaced by a more abstract deity. In broad terms, the transition from the goddess-the-lake to the goddess-the-incumbent in the lake reflects the structural evolution of human religion from animism (belief in the innate soul of the lake) to theism (belief in deities resident in the lake). The virtual absence of the actual lake in Bon literature and the predominance of the figurative lake goddess is an excellent example of assimilated Bon's intention to efface the geographical basis of the indigenous deities and recast them to embody advanced religious doctrines.

Because of the oral traditions which preserve material ignored in written records the primitive character of the lake goddess is still discernible. The oral traditions (e.g. of the anthropomorphic lake or the lake as the mother of elemental spirits) make up what can be termed the "folk goddess", while the scriptural traditions pertaining to Dang ra comprise the doctrinal goddess. These are her two primary chronological and metaphysical faces: the doctrinal goddess who belongs to the age of modern religion, and the folk goddess who is part of a corpus of tradition whose origins lie in the aboriginal past.

It is in this context that the two-fold classification of Tibetan cultural traits, the lha chos (religion of the gods) and mi chos (religion of man), is articulated.[7] The lha chos tradition contains the doctrinal goddess and the mi chos tradition, the folk goddess. However, as convenient as this perspective is, the complexity of traditions surrounding the Divine Dyads does not permit a perfect division into two categories. Additionally, the assimilation of prehistoric traditions of the goddess with more modern ones often created a syncretic superstructure, in which both folk and doctrinal traditions are indivisible.

There is a prevalent folk belief that Dang ra g.yu mtsho is hydrologically linked to mTsho ma pham by means of a secret subterranean conduit. This explains why the waters of the two lakes are said to be qualitatively the same and belong to the same sacred milieu. Dang ra is not claimed to be linked with gNam mtsho. One must wonder if this tradition is a reflection of the premier importance of Dang ra g.yum mtsho and mTsho ma pham regions to Zhang zhung history. The importance of Dang ra to Zhang zhung is described in *Ka bstod thugs dam dgyes bskang bzhugs* by Abbot Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, which states that Dang ra along with rTa rgo is a chief protector of Zhang zhung (p. 147).

It is believed that if Dang ra does not freeze over during the cold season, tragedy is certain to strike the region (Ma 1991: 52). This is one of the more dramatic beliefs in the lake as an instrument of prognostication. However, the belief in the appearance of the lake correlating with future events, or in its capability of hosting visions, is not well articulated. The color of the lake is also said to be an indication of the weather to come. The manner in which the waves strike certain parts of the lake shore also predicts the future. In texts, this divinatory faculty of Dang ra has been transformed into the metaphor of the me long which reflects all existence, one of the attributes of the goddess.

According to the *Ma rgyud sgrub skor*, Dang ra g.yu mtsho is the central figure in a quincunx of Ma rgyud dakinis called Dang ra mkha' 'gro bcan gdong lnga (the Five Carnivorous-faced Dakinis of Dang ra). The Ma rgyud deities are described as having frightening mask-like faces, red, white, dark blue, yellow and green in color, wear cemetery ornaments and hold curved swords and skull cups (cf. Ramble: 97). As there are no islands in Dang ra, the central Mother Tantra Dakini of Dang ra lives beside the lake in what is considered its holiest cave, the g.Yu bun sgrub khang. This cave, the nucleus of g.Yu bun dgon pa, contains a rang byung image of the head of the wolf-like dakini. The locations of the four subsidiary dakinis are as follows: north—Mang' ris stod phug; south—Ma mgo g.yu mtsho; west—sPrul pa rgyung rgo; and east—Ma sangs gangs dkar.[8]

The geographical mandala of Ma rgyud merges the entire Bon world, the territories it historically controlled, and those it has pretensions over, into a unified whole. The ancient link between gNam mtsho and Dang ra g.yu mtsho reiterated in this tradition is believed by the Bon po to have originated in Zhang zhung. If indeed there was a tradition of mkha' 'gro ma(sky walking goddesses) overlaying the territory of Zhang zhung, both gNam mtsho and Dang ra g.yu mtsho would have figured into it. In Ma rgyud, the dakinis have a separate identity from the lake goddesses, but one must question whether the origins of the dakinis are not related to the modification of primary goddesses such as gNam mtsho phyug mo and Dang ra rgyal mo.

As at gNam mtsho, a brtan ma goddess lives in the vicinity of Dang ra g.yu mtsho. In the *brTan bzlug las bshus pa*, a gter ma text discovered by rMa ston srol 'dzin at Dang ra g.yu mtsho, one of the 12 brtan ma is Byang gi ga ga gser mo thang who has the secret name gSer thang yi ge ma (She, the Alphabet of the Golden Plain).[9] The residence of this

goddess is a plain bordering the north shore of Dang ra g.yu mtsho called gSer mo thang. This plain, particularly the low lying gSer thang lha separates the Dang ra g.yu mtsho basin from the Dang chung basin. It is told that in the spring time a magically-formed Tibetan alphabet appears in the grass. This tale is well circulated throughout the region and in Bon communities across Tibet. The magical alphabet, which is said to include all 30 of the letters, perfectly formed, is the sign of the brtan ma goddess' presence. Livestock are thought to instinctually search out grass in the vicinity because of its medicinal qualities.

Although the residence of gSer thang yi ge ma is far less spectacular than that of Jo mo gangs dkar, she is in closer geographical proximity to Dang ra. Whether the brtan ma owe their existence to the lake goddesses or to a related tradition remains one of the many mysteries enveloping the origins of pre-Buddhist religion on the Byang thang. The iconographic and functional similarities between the brtan ma and lake goddesses certainly indicate a close relationship, as does the Buddhist tradition of rDo rje kun grags ma living in gNam mtsho.

Images of Dang ra rgyal mo are rare. In the vicinity of the lake, only one mural has survived the Cultural Revolution. It is located on the right rear wall of the assembly hall of the 'Om bu bsam gtan gling monastery, opposite the entrance way from the one of rTa rgo. In the mural, Dang ra is blue in color and wears a green robe. She has a pleasant mien and pacific expression, her body is well-proportioned, and she is young and attractive. She is mounted on a mdzo and holds a vase in her left hand and a festooned arrow in her right.

Fortunately, a second image of the goddess appeared at the Se zhig monastery in 1995. In this painting, she is depicted as a beautiful, benevolent young woman with a white complexion and a soft, maternal countenance. In her left hand, she holds a golden bum pa next to her heart and in her right hand, a long life arrow with five different colored streamers. She wears multicolored boots and robes, golden earrings and a diadem, and, flowers in her hair. Her mount is an aquatic mdzo painted in different hues of blue, and she is enveloped by a ring of fluffy clouds.

The Theogony of Dang ra

In the *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas dag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs*, the primary ancestors of rTa go rin po che were Sangs po 'bum khri and Chu lcam rgyal mo (pp. 120,121). This theogony is also pertinent to Dang ra, whose origins are traced in tandem with her mate. However, a divergence comes in the final stage—while rTa rgo, the bla brag of Bon, is said to have manifested from a ray of light from the miraculous speech of Lha rgod thog pa, Dang ra, the bla mtsho of Bon, is manifested from the saliva of gNam phyi gung rgyal (p. 121). As mentioned in the previous chapter, this descent from gNam phyi gung rgyal is repeated in *gNas bdag lcam dral gyi gzer bu'i cha lag kyi spyi dgos phrin bcol bas pa myur sgrub bzhugs* (p. 259). This text states that Dang

ra and rTa rgo gnas chen mchog are the body manifestation of gNam phyi gung rgyal and that mTsho sman tshe 'dzin srid pa'i rgyal mo (Srid pa'i rgyal mo, the Life-holding sMan of the Lake) manifested at Dang ra (pp. 259,260). Here as the life-holding goddess of the lake, Srid pa'i rgyal mo assumes one of her myriad forms.

The Venerable Tshul khrims rnam rgyal relates that the existence of Dang ra is closely tied to Srid pa'i rgyal mo in her various forms.[10] These forms constitute the basis for the cosmogonic lake goddess and blessed Dang ra by bestowing their compassion (thugs rje) and radiance ('od zer) upon her. Therefore, although she has come to embody these qualities of Srid pa'i rgyal mo, these are not her physical progeny. To this doctrinal interpretation of the theogony of Dang ra rgyal mo, Ven. Tshul khrims rnam rgyal adds that the sanctity of the lake was enhanced by being blessed by the Four Bon Sages (mKhas pa mi bzhi), sTong rgyung mthu chen, Sha ri dbu chen, lCe tsa khar bu and Gyim tsha rma chung, as well as by the great practitioner Sad ne ga'u. The Bon po cite the blessings of these great saints and of Srid pa'i rgyal mo to prove that Dang ra became a Bon protectress with a Bon lineage and theogony.

Ven. Tshul khrims rnam rgyal also mentions g.Yu khug rta (the Turquoise Swallow), a most intriguing deity said to live in the lake and who is able to travel between the srid gsum (locally known as lha yul, mi yul and klu yul). As with g.Yu bya gshog gcig, the mother of gNyan chen thang lha, we can assume that the g.Yu khug rta is an ancient presence at the Dyad predating the modern religions. She is one of the oldest faces of Dang ra rgyal mo, either a pre-Bon manifestation or servant of the goddess as a turquoise bird, and is part of the tradition of ornithomorphic deities closely associated with the Divine Dyads.

Another theogony found in the *Dang ra lcam dral gyi bskang ba zhcs bya ba bzhugs* attributed to rMa ston srol 'dzin (pp. 152-154). According to this text, gNam phyi gung rgyal appeared from the wisdom (ye shes) manifested from the void (dbyings). From her mind manifestation, 21,000 sman mo came into being. In the blissful void in the realm of bDe ldan dbyings kyi klong (the Space of the Heavenly Void) there is Ye shes gsal ba'i sku mkhar (the Fort of the Resplendent Embodiment of Wisdom). Inside it are the Lha sman mched bzhi, consisting of gNam phyi gung rgyal mounted on a dragon, Phyo sman ye sangs seng la chibs mounted on a lion, gNam sman dkar mo mounted on a vulture, and Ye shes gung rgyal mounted on a khyung. These four goddesses are the g.yung drung of life. From them manifests another Ye shes gsal ba'i sku mkhar, situated to the right of Gangs ti se, and to the left of mTsho ma pang in the land of bDe ldan dngul lo zhung (the Heavenly Silver Valley). In this fort is the goddess Dang ra, known as Ma mkha' yangs dbyings kyi yum gcig (the Only Mother of the Vast Void-like Mother Space).

The theogony of rMa ston srol 'dzin clearly establishes that the goddess Dang ra is a cosmogonic goddess and a direct manifestation of the g.yung drung of life. This doctrinal theogony avoids asserting that the Lha sman mched bzhi begot Dang ra but describes the descent from them in terms of indirect manifestations. This design preserves

the theological purity of the theogony and distinguishes it from the more explicit, and less intellectual folk traditions. The ineffable 'Space of the Heavenly Void' is site of the 'Fort of the Resplendent Embodiment of Wisdom', which houses the cosmogonic Lha sman mched bzhi. However, a fort of the same name in the more objectified land of bDe ldan dngul lo zhung is the residence of the more earthy lake goddess Dang ra. This shows the characteristic dichotomy of the Bon cosmogonies separating the spiritual, intangible void and the physical, concrete realm of existence.

Dang ra as Ma mkha' yangs dbyings kyi yum gcig is a goddess whose physical form is the lake, but whose ancestry directly connects her with the sky-dwelling cosmogonic goddesses. The generative qualities of Dang ra are addressed through her theogonic orientation, but in a way that avoids projecting her in the theologically-unsound role as mother of the universe. The theogony set out by rMa ston srol 'dzin eschews the eternalism of primitive folk traditions.

At some point the primordial mother lake was transformed into a refined Bon cosmogonic deity amenable to both tantric and rDzogs chen philosophy. Orthodox Bon scholars assure us this transpired in the time of Zhang zhung, and if this is the case, folk traditions and the Bon ecclesiastical traditions have coexisted since then. In rMa ston srol 'dzin's theogony, descent from the rarefied void to the lake goddess is exclusively matrilineal and may be indicative of a pre-Buddhist matriarchal pantheon.

In the context of the Lha sman mched bzhi, gNam phyi gung rgyal shares the limelight with three other sky or space-dwelling compatriots. Their dragon, lion, vulture and khyung mounts are similar to the four dgra lha of the rlung rta; but instead of one bird member there are two. Here is yet another piece of evidence illustrating the importance of birds to the mythology of the Dyads.

In the cosmogony of rMa ston srol 'dzin the land of bDe ldan dngul lo zhung and its fort are situated between Gangs ti se and mTsho ma pham. This scheme appears to give this Dyad more importance than the one made up of Dang ra and rTa rgo, or perhaps it suggests that Gangs ti se and mTsho ma pang occupy a more fundamental place in Bon cosmogony. The location of the land and fort to the right of Gangs ti se and to the left of mTsho ma pang itself seems to have cosmogonic value. It hints at the generative function of the union of or correspondence between this mountain and lake.

The role of gNam phyi gung rgyal as a genealogical and cosmogonic deity integral to the two pairs of mountains and lakes is clear; however, the historical processes involved with this association as well as her origins remain obscure. She may owe her existence to the cult of the Divine Dyads. The cosmogonic and celestial features of the Divine Dyads could have been elaborated into the great goddess gNam phyi gung rgyal.[11] From a localized cult of indigenous lake and mountain deities, a more advanced sky-dwelling deity common to the entire plateau might have developed, eventually assuming the role of the ancestress of these environment-based deities in an altered cultural environment.[12]

As a manifestation of the qualities of gNam phyi gung rgyal, Dang ra g.yu mtsho

comes into close correspondence with the Bon goddess Byams ma (Loving Mother), the chief manifestation of the goddess Sa trig er sang. Sa trig er sang is no other than Chu lcam rgyal mo, the ancestress of all beings. According to sMan ri mkhan po, there is a Bon tradition which ascribes the existence of all deities to the ramified forms of Byams ma. From one she takes on five forms then eight, then 16, then 32 and so forth through 52, 108, 360, 5,000, 100,000 and finally multiples of 100,000 forms until she embraces the countless deities and manifestations of the Bon pantheon. One of these deities is, of course, Dang ra rgyal mo, an emanation of Byams ma.[13]

In the bskang ba text by rMa ston srol 'dzin, the parentage of Dang ra rgyal mo is recorded (p.161). The mother is kLu mo bun thang (the kLu mo of the Misty Plain) who, like rTa rgo's mother, is a female klu mo, which reinforces the creative function of the klu mo. Her origin in a misty plain reiterates the symbolism of mist as a primordial material or cosmological essence. In 'brog pa myths, dragons are said to live and mate in the mists and certain creatures to spontaneously arise from them.[14]

In this text the father of Dang ra in this text is Yul sa rna ri (the Yul sa of Blue Sheep Mountain). rNa ri, reportedly located east of Dang ra somewhere in the rGya sgog township. According to the g.Yu bun sprul sku, this deity has a pacific mien and a red face. Unfortunately, no other information could be collected on this obscure deity who, along with the mother of Dang ra, is mentioned only in the text by rMa ston srol 'dzin in the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* collection. We can only speculate that Yul sa rna ri was part of an ancient blue sheep cult on the Byang thang. In any event, the two fathers of the Dyad are associated with the upper sphere or celestial realm and the mothers of the Dyad clearly with the underworld. The mythos of the union of the mother earth and father sky is implied here.

Dang ra rgyal mo and her Sisterhood

In *gNas dag lcam dral gyi gzer bu'i cha lag kyi spyi dgos phrin bcol bas pa myur sgrub bzhugs*, a synoptic account of Dang ra and her retinue is given (p. 260). Dang ra is said to have a nang skor of 360 members in addition to 999,000 srid pa'i sman mo, countless lha'i sman mkha' 'gro, the mtsho sman mched lnga, and limitless other members and manifestations. In the *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas bdag lcam dral mchod stod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs* by abbot Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, a thorough description of Dang ra and her retinue is provided (pp. 129-131):

> "Deep inside the turquoise lake of supreme sanctity, the goddess mTsho sman tshe 'dzin rgyal mo (the Life-Holding Queen Lake sMan) resides in a beautiful fort which is bathed in turquoise light and which possesses 100,000 extraordinary qualities. In the middle of the fort, on a throne, the goddess reposes smiling. The face of Dang ra is resplendently white and beautiful. In her right hand, she holds an arrow symbolizing the collecting of life and phywa. In her left hand, she holds a jewelled vase containing life-giving nectar."

Praise is then offered to the union of 100,000 life-holder goddesses. Next the zhi rgyas dbang drag ('phrin las forms) are described, typically beginning with the pacific form. When the only mother (ma gcig)[15] performs as a peaceful deity, her face and body are golden white, like a full moon. In her right hand, she holds a golden vase full of nectar and, in her left, a me long reflecting all the visions of existence. Her circle consists of 100,000 pacific lha sman. In her expanding or conquering form (rgyas pa), her body is a golden turquoise-like golden green. In her right hand, she holds a silver vase full of nectar and, in her left hand, she holds flowers. In her empowering form (dbang po), the dakini form, she has a coral-colored body and the ornaments of the dakinis. In her right hand, she grasps a hook which can retrieve all things in existence, and, in left hand, she holds a lasso which can bind all parts of existence.[16]

In her wrathful form (drag po), her body is black like a srin mo and she is naked and demon-like. In her right hand, she holds a khram shing[17] and, in her left hand, a sack full of diseases which she spreads. She rides a black mule with a white muzzle and roams around the srid gsum. This description of Dang ra rgyal mo has parallels in the 'phrin las of gNam mtsho rDo rje g.yu sgron ma in the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Ka-26*. In itself, it belies the manner in which Bon sacred geography has come under the influence of Indian tantricism. The iconographic details of the four forms of the goddess, however, are more ancient. The me long and vase are pre-Buddhist attributes of life-holding Bon deities. In her basic form, Dang ra rgyal mo holds an arrow in her right hand, an attribute she has in common with rTa rgo dge rgan, rDo rje g.yu sgron ma and gNam thel dkar po. The arrow then is common to all four members of the Dyad and is itself a pre-Buddhist attribute and ritual implement.

According to sMan ri mkhan po, the most important function of the arrow in Bon is not divination but for long life rituals. Hence it is an attribute of long life deities, such as Dang ra rgyal mo, and is also important in Bon marriage ceremonies.[18] Like the arrow, the vase of long life (tshe bum) is an important attribute of Dang ra rgyal mo, and of long life deities in both Bon and Buddhism.[19] For example, at gNam mtsho it is an attribute of the Khrus kyi sgo bzhi and Yum sras. The vase is a natural attribute of Dang ra and gNam mtsho, both archetypal benefactresses, and functions to guard and enhance life.

After describing Dang ra rgyal mo, the text records her four servants. Altogether, these five deities are called the Dang ra mtsho sman mched lnga and are thought of as a sisterhood.[20] In the text Dang ra is called by her most popular name, Dang ra las kyi dbang mo (Dang ra, She with the Power of Destiny), when she is described as the head of the sisterhood. The first among the servants is Dang chung mtsho sman ma, who occupies the position in front of Dang ra (p. 131). Her body is light green, she wears a turquoise head ornament (g.yu yi zur phud), and she rides a blue aquatic horse. She holds a white flag, symbolizing the unfailing protection of the Bon doctrine. She is able to see the srid gsum in its entirety. On the right side of Dang ra is sMan chub mtsho sman ma (the Perfected sMan of the Female sMan of the Lake). She wears white clothes and carries a turquoise basket (g.yu yi za ma tog). She rides a female antelope and holds

a golden gshang. Her great, famous gshang has 100,000 sounds. On the left side of Dang ra is Grogs mtsho sman ma (the sMan of the Companion Lake), who resides in Tha ro mtsho (p. 132).[21] She wears a robe made from the feathers of the king of vultures and holds a silver me long in which all existence appears. She rides a red striped tiger. Praises are offered to her perfect vision. Behind Dang ra is Khro sman gang chung ma,[22] who wears an upper garment of peacock feathers and holds a vase which cultivates the essence of life. Praises such as the g.yung drung of life are offered to her.

The text explains that Dang ra and her servants were bound to an oath by sNang bzher lod po, and praises are offered to these upholders of the Bon doctrine (p. 133). The sister deities each have thousands of emanations in the form of their generating deity. The flag symbolizes clearing the way and providing direction; the gshang, perfection of sound; the me long, perfection of vision; and the vase, the life energy receptacle (p. 133). The sisterhood of Dang ra retains both indigenous and imported symbolism. The vulture feather robe appears to be a pre-Buddhist attribute, while the peacock feather garment is probably of Indian inspiration. The antelope mount is certainly indigenous, as are the turquoise head ornament and turquoise basket.

Confusion in spelling evidently even affected Abbot Nyi ma bstan 'dzin in his text of mdos rituals entitled *Ri mtsho gnas bdag lcam dral gyi gzer bu'i cha lag btsan 'gro'i dpal byin bzhugs*. Variations in the names of the sisterhood are found, as well as some additional iconographical data (pp. 208,209). Dang ra mtsho sman is described as mildly angry and grimacing. She is beautiful, white in color with blushing cheeks, and holds an arrow and vase. Her clothing is blue, she rides a blue mdzo, and her ornaments are made of turquoise, gold pearls and other precious substances. Dang chung mtsho sman g.yu dkar mdog is white in color, carries many flags and rides a blue horse. sMan chung mtsho sman za ma tog has white clothing and her attributes are a golden gshang and vase. Da grogs mtsho sman has a vulture feather dress, holds a me long that reflects the universe and rides a magical tiger with red stripes. Kre sman gong nga gong chung wears a peacock dress, holds a vase and is mounted on a hind. According to local information, this last goddess dwells in bKra ri gnam mtsho, located 70 kilometers west of Dang ra g.yu mtsho.

In the text attributed to rMa ston srol 'dzin, after a brief description of her palace it gives a description of Dang ra (pp. 155,156).[23] The goddess Dang ra is blue in color with turquoise braids and head-dress. She wears a dar chung with a trim of 'phar men.[24] A rainbow aura surrounds her. She wears a shining me long and she is mounted on a turquoise colored deer with a turquoise saddle and yellow reins. In her right hand, she holds a ga'u and, in her left hand, a silver me long. She is surrounded by sman mo and is the only mother of the gshen (Bon) dwelling in the dbyings. When she manifests as chief of the sman, she rides a vulture. When she manifests as chief of the bdud, she rides a blue iron wolf. When she manifests as chief of the brtan ma, she rides on a skyung ka, and when she manifests as chief of the sde brgyad, she rides a blue aquatic mdzo.

The text has its own version of the immediate circle of Dang ra, frequently called

the Dang ra mtsho sman mched lnga (p. 157). In the front position is Dang chung g.yu'i zur phud can riding a blue aquatic horse. In the right position is sMan chung g.yu'i za ma tog, riding an antelope with white markings on its face. In the left position is Da yer se sman rgod de, mounted on a tigress. In the rear position are the bKa' gnyan gsum, including kLu sman gong nga gong chung, mounted on a turquoise deer of the sman. Ngag la skyung,[25] who has a white mouth, and dBal dmar ral kha sman cig ma both ride female antelopes.

A description follows of four goddesses called the secret sman mo of the dmu (p. 158). Although no information on their relationship with Dang ra is given, it is likely that they are manifestations of the goddess. The four are described as residing in a jewelled fort on a turquoise rock situated on the right side of rTa rgo and on the left side of mTsho ma pang. The four are kLu zu g.yu phyug, riding a gnam kyug;[26] g.Yu bun grags mo, riding an aquatic mdzo; sMan btsun phyug mo, riding a turquoise-colored horse; and Dang chung g.yu los riding an aquatic ox. Next comes a poetic description of the lake and environs replete with similes (pp. 158,159):

> "It is a lofty, pleasant land with a multitude of medicinal waters and rows of mountains resembling the teeth of a tiger. mTsho mo (Dang ra) looks like the spread wings of a khyung and the scattered forests like springing 'brong. The slate mountains look like the crossed wings of the khyung and the red rocks like flickering flames. Birds chirp sweetly here."

The description of the region is followed by a list of the nine Byang sman chen mo and their lake residences (pp. 159,160). They are said to be sman of the dmu which manifested from the dbyings. Only seven are listed individually, as if the names of the other two had been forgotten by the time the text was written. Apparently, these nine were part of an ancient ennead of Byang thang goddesses. The seven listed are 1) g.Yu'i sman btsun phyug mo sil—residing in Ma pang mtsho; 2) g.Yu'i sman cig 'phrul mo che—residing in gSang mtsho; 3) Srid gsum 'khrug po'i dbang mo che—residing in g.Yu brag mtsho; 4) g.Yu bun brag gi mthu mo che—residing in Dang ra g.yu mtsho; 5) kLu sman g.yu lo dar zab gyon—residing in sTeng phyug mtsho; 6) sMan chung g.yu yi za ma tog—residing in Sum brag mtsho; and 7) sMan btsun g.yu lo phyug mo sil—residing in gNam mtsho do.

The last details about Dang ra in rMa ston srol 'dzin's text concern the circle of male deities under Dang ra (pp. 161,162):[27] The circle is divided into two halves, the deities on the right and left side of Dang ra. The deities on the right include the leader of the circle, rTa rgo, who rides a pink horse with a white face. Also on the right side is the btsan Pho mo yer tse, who rides a pink grey horse with white spots; the protector, Se btsan, rides a yellow horse; Zu ra de'i rlung btsan rides a dark blue horse; and Yul sa dkar po yul chas rje wears a white cloak (ber) and carries a small spear. The latter deity is described as displaying the force of the btsan against enemies. The deities on the left side of Dang ra are Pha bong gnyan dmar, who wears a cloak of bse; 'Om rong skyes bu,

who wears a tiger skin and is mounted on a light pink horse with a blue face; and rBa drag dar lung klu btsan, who rides a blue aquatic horse.

Unlike the later texts by Abbot Nyi ma bstan 'dzin and rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan, the text by rMa ston srol 'dzin in both its title and contents clearly favors Dang ra over rTa rgo. Superficially, this can be explained by the fact that the bskang ba was specifically written for the goddess Dang ra. Nevertheless, this bias towards the lake may have a historical basis in that Dang ra as a female deity was more significant than her mate rTa rgo before the advent of assimilated Bon. Allusions to Dang ra and her sisterhood as the g.yung drung of life indicate the dominance of the lake in the prehistoric period.

The Zoomorphic Dang ra

The mounts of Dang ra and her sisters include deer, wolves, antelope, horses and mdzo. Rather than assuming theriomorphic forms, with the exception of the Ma rgyud dakinis, the goddess uses animals for mounts. In the oral tradition, however, Dang ra is said to manifest as a mdzo in certain circumstances, and it is also likely that she has other zoomorphic manifestations. The Dyads, like the people who created and propagated their mythology, are dependent on animals for their way of life.

After the foundation myth in the *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas bdag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs*, some vital data on the make-up of the lake is given (p. 122). Dang ra, called mTsho phyug g.yu mtsho in the text, is said to have the shape of a khyung and is called the excellent seed (gdan mchog) of Sangs po (Sangs po 'bum khri). On the uppermost portion of the khyung's body is the celestial sphere of Shes rab byams ma, a clearly visible mandala of the ye shes lha mo. In the center of the khyung's heart in the lake is gNam phyi gung rgyal and a mandala of 100,000 rgyas pa'i sman mo. On the beak and claws of the khyung, which are churning the water of the lake, is a white wolf-faced mkha' 'gro and a mandala of 100,000 dbang gi mkha' 'gro. From the mild and calm waves of the tips of the wings manifests Mu la tsa med, the cause of liberation and the mandala of 100,000 groups of ma mo.[28]

Dang ra g.yu mtsho is depicted as being khyung-like in this text and in rMa ston srol 'dzin's. Presumably this is a very old tradition and, like the lake's association with gNam phyi gung rgyal, ties Dang ra closely to the celestial realm. As with gNam mtsho, this sky-bound attribution implies that the lakes preside over or transcend the bounds of the srid gsum.

End Notes:

1. In a dictionary of the Zhang zhung language, Dang ra or Tang ra is defined as rgya mtsho (ocean). See Haarh 1968, p. 31; Zhu nyi ma grags pa, p. 8. In Zhu nyi ma grags pa's dictionary, the Zhang zhung equivalent of mtsho is da ti, see p. 7.
2. During a brief journey to Thakali and Tamangi-speaking regions of Nepal the presence of the word Dang ra in their vocabularies was not confirmed.
3. For an English translation of the relevant part of the *Old Tibet Chronicle*, see Beckwith 1984, pp. 210,211. Beckwith equates Dang ko lake with Gri gu mtsho (Knife Lake), a few kilometers west of Yar lha sham po, on the basis of the parallels made between Mount Kailas and Manasarover, and between Gri gu mtsho and Yar lha sham po in the text. The former two are in close geographic proximity, and the assumption is made that this is also true of the latter two. See Beckwith 1984: 236,237.
4. In the *Gangs ti se'i dkar chag*, Ma pang g.yu mtsho is host to various beings. Ma pang g.yu mtsho is said to be the dwelling place of klu, gzi chen (a kind of klu) and the goddess, Ma pang phyug ma. A great many treasures of the klu are said to be found in the lake, as well as crystal and golden bubbles, and medicinal plants. The text also states that the lake is always covered by a dense fog. See Norbu and Prats: 111.
5. In China, as in Tibet, the dragon is a beneficent aquatic creature or spirit representing the fecundating principle, and is a rain-maker. In ancient times, the dragon was the mythic father of the kings. It is said that dragons ascend into the sky in spring, and conceal themselves underwater in the autumn. There are earth dragons, celestial dragons and dragons who guard hidden treasure. Their bones, teeth and saliva are supposedly used in Chinese medicine. For a discussion on the dragon in Chinese mythology, see Werner, pp. 208-220. The dragon is also a source of elemental power and energy, guardian of paradise and a mount of deities (Birrel: 298). This parallels its functions in Tibetan culture. The oldest represented dragons are found in Neolithic Chinese jade sculptures and Shang dynasty bronzes (Allen: 164).
6. Although the spelling of Khri tse khrus mtsho has been lost, the name has been phonetically preserved in the dialect of the region's 'brog pa. According to a bilingual Zhang zhung-Tibetan text discovered in 1108 by Gyer mi nyi 'od, Khri tse is a word of Zhang zhung origins meaning 'length of life', 'mind' or 'I', while khri seg means 'vital force' or 'life' (Norbu 1995: 232). The correct spelling of Khri tse khrus mtsho was not obtained in the field. Local 'brog pa instead spelled it khri se, which, upon analysis by sMan ri mkhan po and sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, was found to be either incorrect or inappropriate. The other reason the spellings given in this work are preferred is because of the Tibetan tradition of the eyes being a window of the mind and life-force. During the field surveys, incorrect spelling of toponymns and other words was found to be a common occurrence, no doubt in part due to the poor educational facilities. Given the situation, it is quite outstanding that there are many literate people on the Byang thang. This is attributable to the resolute determination of the people to retain their culture and the tradition of family-based education.
7. The division of Tibetan civilization into the lha chos and mi chos categories was favored by

R.A. Stein as a means of distinguishing cultural traits evolving from Bon and Buddhism, and the ones which belong to unnamed, unsystematized folk traditions. See Stein, pp. 190-195. The terms lha chos and mi chos are often confined to the narrower categories of customary versus ecclesiastical law and other social codes.

8. Thanks are due to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag for locating the Ma rgyud dakinis of Dang ra from the relevant body of literature.
9. This brtan ma goddess belongs to a subgroup known as Phyogs bzhi'i sman btsun khyed bzhi (the Four sMan Mistresses of the Four Cardinal Directions).
10. Tshul khrims rnam rgyal, the senior most monk of Phyug 'tsho dgon pa and a recognized expert on the mythology of the Dyad, is one of few precious human treasuries of traditional knowledge left at Dang ra g.yu mtsho. His knowledge of his culture, history and religion is all-encompassing. Sadly, much of his learning is liable to disappear with him, as there seems to be little interest in the more esoteric aspects of local history and lore among the younger generation. This is mainly due to altered economic and social priorities.
11. A strong continuity of great goddess figures is predicated in the mythology of the Divine Dyads. However, the appearance of these ancient goddess figures is unknown. If examples from Chinese culture are indicative, we can expect that they were characterized by zoomorphism. For example, legends, texts and grave sculptures dating from around the 3rd century B.C.E. speak of the Mother Queen of the West (Hsi-wang-mu), a popular Chinese cult deity. She was conceived of as an immortal dwelling in a grotto in the western K'un-lun mountains inside a metal house in a stone city. She had a human body, a leopard's tail, tiger's teeth, brilliant white, tangled hair, and a jade hair ornament. Three green birds delivered food to her. See Dubs, p. 8. She was a polyfunctional and ambivalent deity who evolved from a savage plague-bringer to a cultured and humanized queen (Birrel: 171-175). While any direct correspondence between Hsi-wang-mu and the goddesses of the Dyads is unlikely, she does illustrate that, before the rise of the Yar lung dynasty, powerful female deities were known in regions adjacent to the Byang thang. To this day on the Byang thang, male deities have never fully supplanted female deities. In fact, one of the characteristic features of the contemporary cult of the Divine Dyads is the balance and reciprocity that exists between the male and female deities.
12. Such a theory is in consonance with the generally accepted structural development of religion from the primitive and autochthonous to the advanced and philosophical through the course of human civilization.
13. In her primary form, Byams ma is yellow in color with a golden vase in her right hand and a me long in her left. She is bathed in the crystal light of the sun and moon, is in the posture of dance, and is adorned with a turquoise crest, jewelled bracelets, anklets, earrings, and a necklace of 108 beads. See Kvaerne 1995, p. 28).
14. In ancient China, the basic cosmological principle was the primeval vapor which embodied the cosmic energy regulating time, space and matter (Birrel: 23).
15. Ma gcig literally means 'only mother' or 'one mother' but in this context it denotes the exclusiveness and uniqueness of the deity and is used as term of respect and power.

16. The hook and lasso attributes of Dang ra rgyal mo symbolize her power and sovereignty over existence.
17. The khram shing is a symbol of her ability to bind beings to suffering or, conversely, to release them from pain and suffering.
18. The three kinds of arrows used in the diverse Bon marriage ceremonies are lha mda' sgro dkar (divine arrow with white feathers), tshe mda' nya mig (life arrow of the groom) and dPal mda' (glorious arrow of the bride)(Karmay 1975: 211). In A mdo, the maternal uncle brought an arrow adorned with ribbons of five colors and a silver me long when a son was born, which was kept in the family chapel (Karmay 1975: 212). Also in A mdo, long arrows were placed in the yul lha la btsas on an annual basis (Karmay 1975: 212). Other deities with the divination arrow as an attribute include rNam sras nag po rta sngon can, Nyi ma gzhon nu (a guardian), 'Brog bza' lha lcam ma and Pho gyong bza' (two goddesses in the retinue of Pe har), rDo rje khyung lung ma (related to brtan ma), kLu sman gtso mo (consort of local protective deity Brag nag btsan rgod) and Ma gcig dpal gyi lha mo (a mo lha)(Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 71,94,118, 197,198,249,327). Divination arrows are especially used in the rites of the rNying ma pa and Bon po and there are various kinds depending on the ritual and the deity honored. Deities worshipped in this way include Tshe dpag med, Gu ru rin po che, rNam thos sras, Tshe ring mched lnga and rDo rje g.yu sgron ma (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 365-367). Arrows are also used in thread-cross ceremonies, and by medical practitioners and low-ranking oracles in a procedure called 'jib rgyab pa (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 367,368). The Buryat use arrows in many of their ceremonies also, and it is an exorcisory device and offering of most of the Siberian peoples (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 543,544).
19. In the Bon tradition, there are two major types of bum pa, the tshe bum and the sgrub bum (propitiation vase). Virtually all sutrayana and tantrayana rituals use sgrub bum to enshrine the energy or life force of the deity being propitiated. When used in this way, the vase is divided into three parts which represent the three bodies of the deity (sku gsum). The vase is also an attribute of Sha med rdo rje g.yu bun ma (a brtan ma), ma mo and srog lha (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 187,271,272,332). Srid pa'i rgyal mo, in her wisdom manifestation as Ye shes dbal mo, holds a bum pa. Deities that have both an arrow and vase as attributes include bKra shis tshe ring ma (a leader of the tshe ring mched lnga), a daughter of the mountain god rMa chen spom ra and the gzhi bdag, dNgul zla btsan gnyan po (Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 179,211,224,225). The latter male deity, like rTa rgo in one instance, has a vase but in general it is an attribute of female deities as they are closer to the mother or life-giver archetype.
20. *rTa dang tshogs bskang* by rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan devotes less than one page to Dang ra and her circle of sman (p. 176). They are collectively called the sMan btsun lnga (the Five sMan Mistresses), and are said to be the five female manifestations of rTa rgo's mind (rTa rgo'i thugs byon mo btsun lnga). No description of the five is provided, only the names: Dang ra las kyi dbang mo che, Dang chung g.yu'i zur phud can, sMan chung g.yu yi za ma tog, Da yar se sman rgod de sman and Kre de'i mtsho sman mthing kha ma. According to the text attributed to Zhang zhung Hri pa gyer med, the five are Dang ra las kyi dbang mo, Dang chung g.yu yi zur phud can, sMan chung g.yu yi za ma tog, Da yar phro sman sgo de

ma, and Kre de chen mo rol cig ma. Some of these name variations can be assigned to spelling mistakes and copying errors.

21. Tha ro mtsho, also spelled Tha rog mtsho, is located about 200 kilometers west of Dang ra g.yu mtsho in 'Brong pa county.
22. The meaning of the name of the goddess, Khro sman gang chung ma, is unclear, specifically the significance of gang chung. Perhaps gangs chung (small mountain) is intended.
23. For a more detailed description of Dang ra rgyal mo's palace supposedly received in a dream by a g.Yu bun lama named bsTan pa rgyal mtshan, see Ma 1991, pp. 54,55. In the middle of the lake is a palace built of emeralds, with an azure blue portal inscribed with three large characters. The palace is guarded by tigers and lions, and each of its four walls is painted in a different color. In the center is a bejewelled throne decorated with animals, with a crystal stupa resting on a lotus cushion on which rests a crystal stupa. This stupa is 13 storeys tall and carved with the images of 1,008 buddhas. Suspended above it is a brilliant sun and moon.
24. No identification of the costume called Dar chung nor 'phar men its decoration has been forthcoming.
25. Evidently skyung is a spelling error which actually refers to the khyung.
26. An identification of gnam kyug has not been made.
27. The text concludes with offerings to the lcam dral (pp. 163,164).
28. In this description of the lake by Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, we meet the deity Mu la tsa med, a wrathful Bon protectress associated with sound for the first time. According to sMan ri mkhan po, Mu la in the Zhang zhung language means gung or nam and tsa med denotes a female or woman. Mu la tsa med, also known as sGra bla ma, traditionally dwells on the mountain gNas chen mo sna gnyis (Gurlha Mandhata) located south of mTsho ma pham. sGra bla ma is the queen of nine sGra lha brothers who are yul lha in agricultural villages in the gLang chen (Sutlej) valley in mNga' ris and Khu nu on both sides of the Indo-Tibetan border. In some Kinnauri dialects, tsa med means rainbow. Gurlha Mandhata, in the Buddhist tradition, is the residence of Sarasvati.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Appeasement and Worship of Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo rin po che

Introduction

Environment-based deities like Dang ra and rTa rgo are treated as spiritual objects for two basic reasons: fear and gratitude. Fear of the Dyad unleashing untoward events prompts local residents to treat the mountain and lake with the utmost respect. Herein lies the origins of the ancient bskang ba rites, which are characterized by appeasement, placation and inducement. Conversely, the inhabitants are aware that the mountain and lake are the foundation of the ecosystem in which they live, and are highly relevant to their welfare. Hence people offer them thanks and appreciation. From this positive motivation, incense hymns, songs and the verses of the sacred geographical texts were composed. These two basic motivations for worship can be termed aversive and approbative.

If fear is the negative motivation behind religious activity, appreciation is its ennobling counterpart. A complex range of emotions is at play in the ritual undertakings directed towards Dang ra and rTa rgo, from the lowly to the sublime. At one extreme, the rites facilitate a greatly enriched, even rapturous interrelationship between the Dyad and the ritualist. This afflatus is the domain of great saints and adepts, though all others who invoke the Dyad do so to open a pathway of communication. When this is established, exchange between the Dyad and the ritualist begins. The exchange is reciprocal, with both parties giving something and expecting something in return. In this way, the rites of the environment-based divinities are more utilitarian than the ones used in the worship of the higher deities, even mercenary.

The most common means of worshipping rTa rgo and Dang ra is through the burning of fragrant substances, usually vegetal substances, but occasionally minerals or animal products are offered. On a daily basis, local residents offer juniper to rTa rgo the yul lha.[1] Special burnt offerings are made during the shearing of animals and in the spring when milk output begins to increase. Occasionally, incense offerings are made to Dang ra to bring rain or before sowing and harvest. The ritual can be as basic or complex as a person desires, and this latitude helps to explain its popularity.

The erection of prayer flags and the construction of la btsas are popular modes of worship designed to ensure concordance between the worshipper and mountain. For example, in the Buddhist 'brog pa community of Bar la on the western flanks of the rTa

rgo range there is a local shrine to rTa rgo which includes these objects.[2] Since rTa rgo presides over worldly affairs, it is believed that his assent and sympathy are indispensable for success in day-to-day life. The erection of cairns and prayer flags helps to win the acquiescence of the mountain because these objects have an inherent affinity with the mountain. The cairn is a model of the holy mountain, while the prayer flag emits the same positive energy (rlung rta) as the mountain. Cairns are built for Dang ra at the ritual bathing sites and at other intervals on the circumambulatory trail around the lake. Some of these cairns, depending on the direction of the shoreline and the orientation of the pilgrim, are in line with rTa rgo and Dang ra and are offered to both of them.

A substantial portion of a family's income comes from the sale of wool, which also provides cordage, blankets, rugs and clothing for domestic use. At the time of shearing, and also at the beginning of the milking and birthing season, special offerings of butter and cheese are offered to the Dyad. A tray of these items is placed in a specially built niche in the wall of the corral. This niche is not found in many other places on the Byang thang and may be a custom particular to the region.

Another fairly popular custom in central and western Byang thang is the making of a garland of the ears of the sheep or goats slaughtered by a family. After an animal is slaughtered, an ear is cut off and offered to the wrathful protectors. The ears accumulate for years and eventually long strings form. The resulting garland (a 'phreng) is suspended off of the front or pho lha pole of the 'brog pa tent. The animal is not sacrificed to the protectors, but rather a part of the slaughtered animal is offered to ensure their protection. In the vicinity of rTa rgo, the btsan forms of the mountain gods receive this offering. Some families desist and instead tie a brown rope around the pho lha pillar, which reportedly has the same effect.

According to Bya do bsod nams bzang po, although the Bon po villages of Bya dur and La sbug have their own yul lha, rTa rgo is entreated primarily when a bride is brought to her new household or during the construction of a new house. On these very special occasions the rlung rta of rTa rgo is sought for his benediction. Such practices occur in other villages of sTod and gTsang as well, underscoring the wide regional significance of the mountain.

Pilgrimage

One of the greatest expressions of worshipping the Dyad is circumambulation.[3] The pilgrimage around the lake is rarely undertaken during the summer, when the rTa rgo gtsang po is at its maximum volume and is often unfordable. Even in summers of light rainfall, this river proves a very formidable obstacle to all travellers. This is the only physical obstacle to the pilgrim, save for the occasional summer torrent or blizzard. The skor lam circumscribing both Dang ra and rTa rgo, in addition to a number of small passes on the lake circuit, crosses two larger passes on the mountain circuit: gLa nga la to the north and rBa rong la to the south.[4] The circumambulation of the mountain adds

nearly 100 miles to the journey. Pilgrimage to the mountain and lake is reportedly most popular with Bon po from sTeng chen and sBra chen counties.

Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas bdag lcam dral mchod stod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs(p. 128) asserts that pilgrimage to the gnas mchog mtsho brag, including the activities of circumambulation, prostration and prayer discharged with faith purifies hindrances and increases life and wealth. The text adds that such a pilgrimage allows the protectors and attendants of the gnas mchog to fulfil wishes. Prostration, offering and circumambulation (phyag mchod dang skor ba byed pa) are the standard textual formula of activities for a place of pilgrimage (cf. Huber 1994: 34).

The benefits of pilgrimage to the mountain and lake are not solely spiritual; health, good luck and long life and other palpable benefits are attributed to this circumambulation. According to Nain Singh, a complete circuit of both holy objects absolves ordinary sin; two circuits, the sin of murder; and three circuits absolve even the most heinous of crimes such as matricide or patricide (Nain Singh: 171). Pilgrimage is not only a spiritual exercise to accrue merit but it bestows blessings and empowerments (byin brlabs) for the luck and destiny (bsod bde) of the pilgrim.

While most pilgrims to the Dyad are Bon po, Buddhists occasionally make the pilgrimage, particularly those from upper gTsang, Ngam ring, 'Brong pa, Lha rgyab and Nag tshang. Though not to the extent of the Bon po, Buddhists are attracted to the Dyad in fairly significant numbers, particularly to rTa rgo—the natural beauty and legendary sanctity of the Dyad act as a natural magnet for spiritual seekers. The precedent for this goes back to the early Buddhist settlement in the region. In the *Lho rong chos 'byung*, in a biography of U rgyan pa (circa 1250), the foremost disciple of rGod tshang pa, after returning from a trip to India, met the adept Shak ras pa at a place called rTa sgo chu mig ka ru (*Lho rong chos 'byung*: 731).

For centuries, Dang ra and rTa ro have been sought out by Bon practitioners as highly favorable places to pursue their religion. Their presence adds significantly to the sanctity of the region. Pilgrims are as much attracted and fascinated by great past visitors as they are to the Dyad. The *gZi brjid* states that secret and solitary places—including uninhabited valleys, forests, lakes, snowy crags and rocky mountains—are ideal for rDzogs chen practice (Snellgrove 1967: 195,196). It specifies that the place must be untrammelled, harmonious, favorable and geomantically correct (Snellgrove 1967: 195,196). rTa rgo and Dang ra meet these specifications in every way. Even high rDzogs chen practitioners pay their respects to the mountain and lake. A rDzogs chen sadhana by the great Bon scholar Shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan (1859-1935) instructs practitioners to begin their practice by making offerings to the mountain gods and other powerful spiritual beings, and to inform them of the practice so they are not disturbed (Namdak: 35).

Scriptural Worship

The worship of a Divine Dyad is said to bring manifold advantages to those who petition it.[5] In a 'phrin las bcol (recital praising the benefits the deities are entrusted to bring) located in the *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas bdag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs*, the benefits bestowed by rTa rgo and Dang ra upon their supplicants are reviewed (p. 142). They are said to protect one from disturbances and enemies, purify defilements, allow life, luck and fortune to flourish, and fulfil wishes. With terrific power they liberate enemies and disturbances. A prayer to the Divine Dyad (ri mtsho) follows in which a whole range of petitions are made (p. 142,143):

> "I prostrate to you in faithful refuge and with respect. Please help us to realize liberation and wisdom so that we may understand the nature of impermanence. Purify the obstacles to wisdom and provide for the procurement of merit. Bless this life with great perfections. Bless us with health. Bless us with wealth. Bless us with fortune and luck. Bless us with power and energy to subdue our enemies. Bless us with bliss and joyfulness. Bestow upon us relative and ultimate blessings at this moment".

The secret mantra of the ri mtsho is given with the implicit understanding that, by recitation, the above-mentioned benefits will be realized. The mantra is a combination of Sanskrit and Zhang zhung words which were reputedly used long before Buddhism arrived in Tibet. The mantra reads: Om' sad ber ratna siddhi bum 'du rmar. Curiously, while the prayers and requests made above are explicitly directed to the worldly mountain and lake, the attainment of liberation and wisdom is the provenance of the higher Bon deities. Once again, rTa rgo and Dang ra have been amalgamated with the more sophisticated doctrinal deities of Sutrayana and Tantrayana, creating a worldly deity who behaves as a higher divinity. This transformation is also demonstrated in the text when the members of the Dyad are requested to take their place among the wisdom gods and demonstrate the nature of impermanence (p. 147).

In the same text, the Dyad is sought to usher the following seven kinds of prosperity: 1) joy in the country; 2) the necessary conditions to develop inner wisdom; 3) the kindness of the dakinis; 4) the luck of the teacher; 5) the luck of the meditator; 6) the luck of the yi dam; and 7) the luck of the sponsor (p. 144). The Dyad is not just a protector of the religion, but also appears in its more ancient role. On the last page, the tone of the prayers reverts to the original character of the Dyad as the holy couple are beseeched to always permit life and fortune to flourish (p. 147).

The purpose of *gNas bdag lcam dral gyi gzer bu'i cha lag kyi spyi dgos phrin bcol bas pa myur sgrub bzhugs* is forthrightly stated to be the fulfilment and success of the monastery (g.Yu bun dgon pa?)(p. 250),[6] and to enhance the well-being and happiness of the country and its inhabitants (p. 251). Moreover, they are designed to eradicate the crises of disease, hunger and strife, and to eliminate the negativities of this Black bsKal pa (Age of

Darkness)(p. 252). The text notes that if the yul lha are left unfulfiled, they can react negatively (p. 253). There are many other lines dedicated to the Dyad asking for protection and assistance (p. 253-258), such as protection against unusual snowfall (p. 257).

The text maintains that the four Bon jewels reside at the gNas mchog (Superior Sacred Place, or Dyad)(pp. 259,260). First, four Sutrayana jewels (objects of refuge) are cited: lama, gShen rab mi bo che, Bon and the assembly of gShen rab g.yung drung sems pa, followed by the four Tantrayana jewels: lama, yi dam, rigs 'dzin and mkha' 'gro. This affiliation with the fundamental structures of the Bon religion that forges and perpetuates the Dyad's role as Bon protectors. The association of the Dyad with the objects of refuge is the essence of its modern Bon identity.

In the *Ka bstod thugs dam dgyes bskang bzhugs* of Abbot Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, the following invocation to the lcam dral is made (pp. 147-149):

> "Please come to this place where I am offering these prayers with consonant motivation and thoughts. I petition you to wear pleasing dress and ornaments, and I have prepared offerings of tea, chang, medicine, blood and the mngar gsum (jaggery, honey and crystal sugar) in the skull of a fish for you. Do not break your vows and do not let your service to humanity diminish. I, at present, make these offerings for your satisfaction. I make these offerings to you on a daily basis in order that we (the ritualist/all humanity) are released from sickness and fatal disease. So that you dispel disturbances and enemies I give you mdzo, sheep, horses and yaks as tribute for the satisfaction of the sister and brother protectors. I invoke the eight powerful brothers of rTa rgo without being motivated by worldly thought, through the power of the recitation of mantras, to come here immediately. Please be aware of our entreaty. Liberate us at once from the forces that are inimical to White Hat Bon (orthodox Bon). I, the benefactor, wish that you are as famous as a horned khyung and that you will always protect us without fail. Offerings of meat, blood and gtor ma so plentiful as to cover this entire land are made so that you will spread Tantric Bon like a blossoming sunflower."

In the *Lha chen rta sgo'i mchod bskang zhes bya ba zhugs* by rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan, a series of offerings are made to rTa rgo rin po che. It should be noted that many of these offerings are made in a figurative sense. For the satisfaction of the rTa rgo mched bdun rol brgyad, offerings of a golden wheel of 1,000 spokes, jewels and auspicious symbols are made (p. 171). In order to fulfil their desires, tasty foods and magnificent mountains and lakes are offered (p. 172). Then a variety of exquisite objects of the five senses are presented to rTa rgo and his retinue (pp. 172-174). These include a 'brong standing like a mountain, a wolf, a deer, other unspecified wild animals, lha rta (divine horse), a white sheep, religious clothing, weapons of the victorious, prayer flags, a divination arrow, pleasant sounds of trumpets and other musical instruments, gtor ma, medicine and blood. rTa rgo and his retinue are offered a rta mchog, birds and a khyung to ride

(p. 174). For rest they are offered an invincible castle, and messengers when they are active (p. 175). The lha btsan and klu btsan are offered the utmost co-operation of the officiants.

An unusual offering made to rTa rgo is the bya grags dkar po (the famous white bird)(p. 176).[7] Crops are offered to rTa rgo mtsho sman phyug mo (Dang ra) and Gya' ri phyug mtsho (p. 77). The fertility function of the lakes, even in this text where rTa rgo predominates, is conspicuous in this offering of the produce of the land. Jo bo lha ri and Jo mo 'bri je are offered g.yu (turquoise), mchong (semiprecious stone) and a 'phang (spindle)(p. 177). The chief sman mo of the northern continent (Dang ra?) and powdered gold are also offered to rTa rgo, but most unusual is the offering of a beautiful young woman (p. 178). As no Bon doctrine or tradition explaining this last offering has been discovered, it probably has something to do with a local or ancient tradition. Women might have been given over to the mountain perhaps as priestesses, sacrifices or consorts in prehistory.

The ritualist asks a couple of rhetorical questions and then makes an endorsement of his feelings towards rTa rgo (p. 186). The text reads:

> "Without people to make offerings to the protectors how can they display their power? Without protectors, who will help humanity? There are many people who follow and believe in you, but I am inseparable from you. There are many people who request and seek your assistance, but I am the one who can be deeply connected to you."

The purpose of the bskang ba ritual is reiterated on the last page (p. 188):

> "The great protector rTa rgo and your retinue please be concentrated upon us. We pray to you heartily. We offer to you good chanting with clear words and a proper rhythm. We offer you and to all the other protectors of Bon blood, flesh, gtor ma and a variety of other objects. Please accept these sincerely made offerings. gTor ma and other things are offered to the yul lha, dgra lha and all the other protectors of Bon. We, the circle of your followers, want to be wealthy, famous, healthy, to have a good future and to be free of disease and disturbances. Protect and assist virtuous activities. Fulfil all our requests!"

In *rTa rgo'i gsol mchod*, used in the village of sGrol thang, the central theme is the reclamation of the g.yang and phywa with the aid of rTa rgo. The invocation of the phywa, the vital base of the g.yang (good fortune) and the g.yang itself is related to the most important concerns of the people. In the manuscript, the phywa and g.yang of the country of rTa rgo are invoked linked to essential resources that are to be augmented. These resources include gold and silver in the treasury, good food and wealth for people, rain, crops and livestock. We can suppose that since the founding of the Shes pa bcu gnyis rites, rTa rgo has been involved with the protection and increase of the g.yang and phywa. Despite being used by a Buddhist village, this is a Phywa Bon incense text (the

branch of Bon specializing in such rites).The involvement of rTa rgo with the phywa and g.yang explains his influence over health and well-being.[8]

Buddhists have adapted the rTa rgo incense hymns to conform to their tenets and practices, but have actually made very few changes to the invocations and iconography of the originally Bon deity. *rTa mgo dwangs ra gsol mchod,*[9] in addition to enumerating the members of the rTa rgo brotherhood and Dang ra g.yu mtsho sisterhood, contains a Buddhist-style visualization (mngon rtogs) and transformation (stong sbyang). In another Buddhist incense hymn, *rTa sgo'i gsol mchod,* a Buddhist sadhana comprising six lines was interpolated onto the Bon text (fol. 1v,2r).[10] This sadhana consists of the following activities performed to a personal tutelary deity (yi dam) visualization, consecration, and transformation. These activities are subsumed by a dharani that prefaces them. This dharani is of hybridized Sanskrit which is heavily corrupted with Tibetan phonetics.

Tshogs Offerings

The liturgy of mountain and lake worship is most elaborate in sacrificial offerings (tshogs). The Bon po have created complicated rituals which combine tantra with the worship of rTa rgo and Dang ra. One example of these complex tshogs rites is the *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas bdag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs.* After the preliminary observances, instructions are provided for making tshogs offerings to the Dyad.

First, the tshogs to Dang ra is described (p. 84). The outer support (phyi rten) for her offering consists of the ingredients (gtor rgyu) themselves, which are rtsam pa, conch shell, curd, turquoise, coral, milk and dbang po lags (medicinal plant). The inner support (nang rten) is a cylindrical gtor ma with pointed tops placed in the center and at the cardinal directions of the mandala. A me long and female mdzo, made from white butter, are placed in front of the gtor ma. The secret support (gsang rten) of the goddess is ann arrow and silver me long with red, blue, green, yellow and white ribbons.

For the tshogs for rTa rgo (pp. 85,86), the outer support consists of rtsam pa sculptures of lha g.yag dkar po, lha lug dkar po, red horse of the btsan and a red goat. The inner support is a palace built on a square base of four tiers, decorated with the symbols of the zhi rgyas dbang drag[11] and adorned with a flaming nor bu on the pagoda roof. On the upper-most tier of the base are seven elongated triangular gtor ma, each decorated with a diagonal line called zur gsum btsan lam (the path of the btsan of the three corners). On the east side of each of the lower three tiers a conical gtor ma of the klu, decorated with a coiled snake, is placed. On the north side of the lower three tiers of the base, there are elongated gtor ma of the bdud with four sides twisted to the right. On the west side of the three tiers are gtor ma of the btsan with three corners, and on the south side, gtor ma of the gnyan with four corners. The figures decorating the gtor ma are birds on the south side, deer and carnivores animals on the north side, a coiled snake on the west side, and aquatic animals on the east side.

The secret support of rTa rgo consists of a spear standing upright, with its base planted in a vessel full of rice or grain.[12] The text stipulates that offerings for the gsang rten include medicinal substances mixed with alcohol, blood, bone, human flesh and fruit. Traditionally, these offerings were put into bowls and placed alongside the spear. The spear is festooned with a white streamer, three wing feathers of an eagle, images or the names of the rTa rgo mched bdun and the gsang 'khor (secret circle). The gsang 'khor is a special kind of sacred container called a bla rten, which is affixed to the shaft of the spear and acts as a support for the bla of rTa rgo when he embodies the tshogs during the ceremony. The gsang 'khor is the very heart of the ritual array but it only functions as a vessel for the bla of rTa rgo after the sequence of offerings and prayers have been properly made.

All of the offerings made to Dang ra in the tshogs rituals belong to a the pacific deity, while the ones for rTa rgo are made to both wrathful and pacific deities. The selection of offerings reflects the basic personalities of the members of the Dyad. As both the arrow and spear are important attributes of the Dyad, they make appropriate secret supports of the two deities.

Once the physical structures of the tshogs are in place, it can be ritually offered to the deities. This begins with the gegs sprud pa (removing of hindrances to the ceremony), followed by the mtshams bcod pa (the demarcating of the boundaries of the ceremony), and then by the generation of altruistic wishes and the taking of refuge (pp. 87-89). The next step in the ritual is the consecration of the gtor ma (mchod rdzas byin gyi brlabs)(pp. 90-99). This entails a series of visualizations including those of the mGon po rnam gsum. The Dyads enter the visualization when the ritualist is instructed to envision the mandala of the 360 Ge khod deities on his right side and in particular rTa rgo dge rgan and rTa rgo mtshan rje mched bdun (the rTa rgo Brotherhood of Seven with the Kingly Signs)(p. 97).

For visualization of Dang ra, the ritualist is instructed to generate the syllable ma on the left side of his body from whence the 990,000 srid pa'i sman, Dang ra mtsho sman and the four subordinates of Dang ra, the sman phran, must be visualized (p. 98). This is followed by a visualization of four mkha' 'gro with different colored bodies and different heads of animals (p. 98). After the visualizations and consecration comes the confession (sdig bshags)(p. 104), followed by sman mchod pa, gtor ma and other offerings (pp. 104-107). This is followed by meditation on the qualities of Dang ra (bsgom), mantra recital ('dzab) and offerings of mantras to the deities ('dzab mchod)(pp. 108-115). Subsequently, there are more visualizations and further recitation of mantras as part of another stage of tshogs rituals including the banishing of demons (ling ga bsgral pa) and sending them into oblivion (ling ga bstabs pa)(pp. 115-119). The final stage before the iconography and theogony of the Dyad is the satisfaction of the lineage lamas through the tshogs offering (brgyud bskong)(pp. 119,120). The text concludes by specifying the benefits the ritualist should expect from the Dyad, which have been converted into deities of an advanced nature (pp. 142-146).[13]

A description of the offerings made to the Dyads is also found in *rTa dang gnyis bskang mdos zhes bya ba bzhugs*, a text devoted to mdos offerings (pp. 279,280).[14] On the ground a base is prepared and a five-tiered structure is erected.[15] On top of the structure, Dang ra gtor ma and rTa rgo gtor ma are placed and covered by an umbrella.[16] Around them nam mkha' (thread cross), divination arrows, wood and fruit are set. Arranged on the upper step are the bkra shis rtags brgyad, the rnam brgyad,[17] and rin chen sna bdun.[18] On the second tier from the top, gtor ma of the klu, btsan, and lha are arrayed, along with the dkar gsum, mnar gsum, medicines for the klu, different types of barley corns and ribbons of cloth in five colors. On the third level are different kinds of effigies of birds. On the fourth step are effigies of beings of the bar (middle sphere), and on the bottom step, effigies of various beings who live in the earth. Around the base of the five-tiered structure mother and father figures, chang, meat, bone, small gtor ma and theb kyu (thumb prints made in dough) are placed.

In the village of sGrol thang in upper gTsang province a simpler tshogs offering is made to the rTa rgo brotherhood. In the center of a tray, the largest gtor ma is given to Yul sa dkar po. This gtor ma is rounded and tapers inwards towards the top. It is decorated with butter sculptures of the heads of a sheep, a goat and a yak situated about one third from the base of the gtor ma, with a sun and moon butter sculpture surmounting it. Flanking the main gtor ma are seven smaller conical ones topped with tiny parasols representing the seven lha btsan. To one side of the tray is a single gtor ma, larger than the ones for the lha btsan, called the klu'i tshogs. It is decorated with a snake winding around it which represents the klu, and tiny sculptures of the bdud mo and ma mo.

Motivated by aversion and approbation, a variety of strategies were developed to worship and appease rTa rgo rin po che and Dang ra g.yu mtsho. In assimilated Bon, these developed into complex rituals and liturgies designed to ensure the cooperation of the Dyad. Whether based in folk tradition or in Bon doctrine, the veneration of the mountain and lake is considered essential to the felicity of the countryside and its inhabitants.

End Notes:

1. This frequently consists of ground juniper needles placed in a pan of burning embers set outside the tent in the morning. Usually this same pan of juniper is used in the worship of the pho lha and other dgra lha.
2. This information was obtained verbally from Melvin Goldstein in September 1996. He conducted field work in Bar la in the late 1980s.
3. Nain Singh claimed that a skor ba of Dang ra required eight to twelve days and was about 200 miles long, and the skor ba of both the mountain and lake demanded a month's time (Nain Singh: 171). In actuality, the circumambulatory trail around the lake is approximately 165 miles in length. Sven Hedin reported that the trip around the lake took a horseman seven ordinary days or five long days (Hedin 1909, vol 2: 28,29). This was a rather unusual way to measure the pilgrimage, because the journey is ordinarily made on foot.
4. Of the three main Dyads of the Byang thang, pilgrimage to Gangs rin po che and mTsho ma pham is by far the most popular and celebrated. For an evocative account of the pilgrimage associated with Mount Kailas, see Moran and Johnson. A classic account of the pilgrimage is also provided by one of the great Indian pilgrims of the 20th century, Swami Pranavananda. See Pranavananda.
5. The longest single text of the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* is the first of the collection entitled *Dang ra g.yu bun bshad sgrub grags rgyas gling tshogs 'don sdus pa nor bu'i gter spungs bzhugs* which consists mainly of dedicatory prayers to a wide range of Bon saints and deities. These were authored by a variety of people, the names of whom often appear in the text. A selection of personalities found in the text include gShen chen klu dga' (pp. 12,40), Dran pa nam mkha' (pp. 13-22), the goddess, Byams ma (pp. 29-38), Yar me shes rab 'od zer (p. 41), 'Dul ba rin po che, Bru ston rgyal ba and Shes rab rgyal mtshan (p. 42), Byu ru Yon tan seng ge (p. 43), Dang ra Shes rin (pp. 43,44), rNam dag tshul khrims (pp. 44,45), Nyi ma bstan 'dzin (pp. 49,50), Shes rab g.yung drung and Shar rdza (p. 50), and sTag la me 'bar (pp. 76-79). Prayers offered to these great masters and deities and others in the text can either stand alone in monastic liturgical rites or act as a prelude to the worship of the Dyad.
6. This is followed by refuge being taken in the Triple Gem (p. 250).
7. This bird has not been identified. Perhaps it has something to do with an extinct legend. If this is the case, both mountain and ancestral spirits are liable to be implicated.
8. Scripture-based worship of rTa rgo as an adjunct to other methods of healing is demonstrated by the following account, which took place in 1995. A young man came to g.Yu bun dgon pa seeking medical assistance from the sprul sku for a sick relative. The sprul sku conducted a divination (mo) with dice and gave allopathic and Tibetan medicine for the patient. The sprul sku also asked the man to instruct the patient to make incense rites to rTa rgo rin po che.
9. This manuscript, consisting of a couple of handwritten pages, was generously made available by Tashi Tsering of the LTWA. It contains no authorship or colophon.
10. This manuscript is used by Buddhists at gNam mtsho who have rTa rgo rin po che as their clan deity.

11. Traditionally, the shapes and directions of the zhi rgyas dbang drag are zhi—circle (east), rgyas—square (west), dbang—crescent (north), drag—triangle (south).
12. As we have seen, the spear is one of the attributes of the rTa rgo brotherhood, of members of gNyan chen thang lha's entourage, and of gNyan chen thang lha himself in his form as kLu bdud thang lha and of Hur pa, both of which belong to Yum sras. The spear is also an attribute of other indigenous deities and was traditionally an offering placed in the rten mkar or gsas mkhar of yul lha deities. The spear is also part of ritual offerings made to the pho lha. As the rock art of Tibet portrays, the spear is an extremely ancient implement on the Byang thang. We can expect that it has not only been a utilitarian object but a ritual one as well for a very long time.
13. A structural outline of Abbot Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's text, *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas bdag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung bzhugs* is as follows: 1) Preliminary practices; 2) the construction of the tshogs; 3) prerequisite practices to the offering of the tshogs; 4) the offering of the tshogs; 5) satisfaction of lineage lamas; 6) theogony of Dang ra and rTa rgo; 7) the higher deities associated with the Dyad and the epic war between the gods and demons; 8) description of Dang ra and her retinue; 9) description of rTa rgo and his retinue; and 10) request for help and protection from the Dyad.
14. According to the colophon of the *rTa dang gnyis kyi bskang mdos zhes bya ba bzhugs* (bsKang ba and mDos Rites Expressly Carried Out for the Dang ra and rTa rgo Pair), it was written by dMu rigs kyi rnal 'byor tshul 'dzin mi 'gyur gtsug phud dbang rgyal and was requested by sKyes mchog khri gtsug bstan 'dzin. It is the last text in the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* collection and is situated between pages 277-297. There are two other texts composing the *rTa dang tshogs bskang* which have yet to be cited. One is entitled *Zhang zhung bon gyi bla mtsho dang ra dang bla brag rta sgo gnyis kyi bskang 'phrin nor bu'i re bskong ba zhugs*, which according to the colophon, was written at rTa rgo'i shel dgon phug by mChog sprul rgyal ba khri gtsug bstan 'dzin. It is situated between pp. 267-276 of the collection. The other text, *Dang ra lcam dral rta sgo mched bdun bcas gyi gtor bskul zhugs*, is attributed to the legendary Sad ne ga'u. It occupies pp. 189-191 of the collection.
15. The five tiers of the base symbolize the five elements.
16. The arrangement of the gtor ma traditionally entailed the Dang ra gtor ma being placed in the middle circled by the rTa rgo gtor ma of the brotherhood.
17. The rnam brgyad are images or symbols of the rTa rgo mched bdun rol brgyad.
18. The rin chen sna bdun are the seven symbols of the universal monarch. They include 1) the precious wheel; 2) the precious elephant; 3) the precious gem; 4) the precious queen; 5) the precious minister; 6) the precious general; and 7) the precious horse. For a description, see Dagyab Rinpoche, pp. 65-85.

MAP OF DANG RA G.YU MTSHO

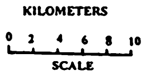
VEHICULAR ROAD	- - - -
TOWNSHIP HEADQUARTERS	●
AGRICULTURAL VILLAGE	●
PERMANENT SETTLEMENT	●
SEASONAL CAMP	●
MONASTERY	
MOUNTAIN	▲
LAKE	
RIVER	
PASS	×
KHRUS SGO	◆

DANG
RA
G.YU
MTSHO

SKYID LUNG LA
SKYID LUNG
ZA LUNG
PHONG CHE CHU
CHUNG LUNG
GSER THANG LA
LUNG GNYI
GANGS LUNG NAG TSHANG
'OM MO CHU
KHAN CHUNG
KHAN CHEN
'OM BU
ZHING LUNG
SMAN KHANG DGON PA
BYANG GYI KHRUS SGO
GANGS LUNG 'DRE DKAR
GLANG SDONG PHUG
GANGS LUNG
DAR CHEN CHU
DAR CHUNG CHU
LAS STOD
GLANG CHEN CHU
GA RA LA
MNA' 'UR LA
GLANG MA
SHA MA LA
GLANG CHUNG CHU
KHYUNG RDZONG
PHO BA RI
LU SNGA GTSANG PO
PHU TSE GTSANG PO
MON RNA LUNG
KHRI TSE KHRUS MTSHO
DUNG RI
G.YU BUN DGON PA
G.YU 'BRUG LA
'JAG LUNG
GSANG RAB
AM RONG
LA LUNG
NID DE CHU
SKYID GSUM
BRAG NAG
PUL SUM
TSAN RAG
LU ZHOS
BAS RAG
SNYING PO
ME TOG
LHA SA
MGAR CHUNG RI
LA RTSE LA
SES GO GTSANG PO
PHYUG 'TSHO GROG PO
GUNG THANG KLU CHU
'A CHEN
HANG DAL
PHYUG 'TSHO DGON PA
YON RTSE
DIB LAS
GYAM CHUNG CHU TSHAN
AR CHUNG MTSHO
GNYAN DMAR
'DZO GZHI



NGANG NGUR
LONG KYOG
SGO BDAG PHUG
RTA RGO 'PHRANG
LHO'I KHRUS SGO
'CHO RJES
LNGA SGOR SGOR
GLA
GLA NGA LA
'BUM NANG CHU
GANGS LUNG
PHA BONG GUR DKAR
RTA RGO GTSANG PO
'DAM KHUNG SHANG
DGAL LA
GANGS LUNG LHA BTSAN CHOG DKAR RJE
YUL SA DKAR PO YUL CHAS CAN
NGO DMAR LHA BTSAN TSHAL THIG RJE
SE ZHIG DGON PA
KRANG RNA
NAG MER KHRUS MTSHO
DKYIL PAG
DPA' BO'I LHA BTSAN RNGA KHUR RJE
GYER KHOD LHA BTSAN DBYUG PA RJE
TSHA CHU
MA MO'I LHA BTSAN U KYU RJE



KHRI MUN LHA BTSAN ZUR RA RJE
LUG TUG BRANG
KYA RGAN
SUM 'BUG
RTA RGO DGE RGAN
KHYUNG KHA
KHYUNG KHA NAG GTSUG

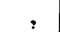
MAP OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

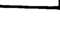
VEHICULAR ROAD 

TOWNSHIP HEADQUARTERS 

AGRICULTURAL VILLAGE 

PERMANENT SETTLEMENT 

SEASONAL CAMP 

MONASTERY 

MOUNTAIN 

LAKE 

RIVER 

PASS 

DEFUNCT AGRICULTURAL LANDS 

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE 

LOCATION UNCERTAIN ?

GSER MO THANG
G.YUNG DRUNG BRAG BTSAN
'OM BU
G.YUNG DRUNG LHA RTSE
SGO BDAG
'GO PO RNAM GSUM
PHU TSE GTSANG PO
GLANG SDONG PHUG
DANG
DAR CHUNG
LAS STOD
GLANG MA
KHYUNG RDZONG
SER MDZOD NUP DZONG ?
O 'DAS PHUG
G.YU BUN DGON PA
GYAM PA'I RDZONG
GYAM BU
SER MDZOD SHAR DZONG ?
'JAG LUNG
GRAG CHUNG RDZONG
RA
LA LUNG
SER PO LA
TSAN RAG
GYANG RDZONG
AR PA'I RDZONG
LHA SA
'PHYUG 'TSHO GROG PO
'A CHEN
G.YU
HANG DAL
PHYUG 'TSHO
LHUN PO RTSE
GNYAN DMAR
MTSHO
NORTH
GANGS LUNG CHU
GANGS LUNG LHA RTSE RDZONG
'DAM KHUNG
PHA BONG KHA ZHAG ?
RTA RGO GTSANG PO
BSLE KHAM PA RDO RING?
SHO KHRAM PHUG
SE ZHIG DGON PA
RDO RANG ?
RDZUL 'PHRUL PHUG
RTA RGO RIN PO CHE

KILOMETERS



SCALE

LUG TUG 'PHRANG
SUM 'BUG RDO RING

CHAPTER NINE

A Survey of Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo rin po che

Introduction

This survey, with its emphasis on regional history and archaeology, affords compelling proof of the importance of the holy mountain and lake in the development of civilization on the Byang thang. It corroborates numerous literary and oral legends, which claim that the region was a center of early Tibetan civilization.

The survey begins at the confluence of the rTa rgo gtsang po and Ngang ma gtsang po, east of rTa rgo dge rgan, and follows the east bank of the rTa rgo gtsang po north to Dang ra g.yu mtsho. The survey proceeds from the east side of Dang ra g.yu mtsho to its northern shore, on to the west side of the lake and finally to its southern shore. From the southern tip of the lake, the survey turns south to explore the west bank of the rTa rgo gtsang po back to its confluence with the Ngang ma gtsang po. By reviewing the sites in a counter-clockwise sequence, they are presented as a Bon pilgrim would see them.

The Confluence

Near the confluence of the rTa rgo gtsang po river and the Ngang ma gtsang po there is a black knob of rock rising roughly 100 meters above the rivers. This formation is called sKyungs ka nag gtsug (the Black Crown of the Head of the Chough). This site is said to be the residence of the goat herder of rTa rgo rin po che, who has the appearance or head of a chough, the Tibetan black bird.[1] On the top of sKyungs ka nag gtsug is a lichen-covered and highly eroded cairn which appears to have been neglected for centuries.

The confluence of the rTa rgo and Ngang ma gtsang po forms part of the border between the Tsho smad township, Ngam ring county in gZhis ka rtse prefecture, and 'Dam khung township, Nyi ma county in Nag chu prefecture. In the pre-Communist period, the confluence of the rivers demarcated the boundary between the La rgyab tsho pa in the 'Brong pa district and the Sang phyug ser gsum tsho pa in Nag tshang district.[2] sKyungs ka, on the west bank of the river, is the most southerly village in Nag tshang and the first village of a Bon enclave extending north to include much of Dang ra g.yu mtsho. The Sang phyug ser gsum tsho pa was in turn divided into three sub-camps: Sang rgyas, Se zhig and Phyug 'tsho. The Sang rgyas sub-camp extended from

the confluence of the rivers along the east bank of the rTa rgo gtsang po up to the southern shore of Dang ra. La rgyab was traditionally part of the estate of the Panchen Lamas while Nag tshang remitted its taxes to Lhasa. Nain Singh reported that the tsho pa, which he called districts, were ruled by a "Pon" (sgar dpon) who was in charge of collecting revenue and adjudicating in disputes and was subordinate to the two rdzong dpon of Shen rtsa (Nain Singh: 172).

Although there are reports of ruins of an ancient fort in the hills overlooking Shu ru mtsho in La rgyab, physical remains do not become common until one enters Nag tshang. Just downstream of the rTa rgo and Nang ma rivers, situated on a shelf about 50 meters above the east bank of the rTa rgo gtsang po, is one of the most extraordinary megalithic sites in Tibet.[3] The site, consisting of hundreds of pink and red porphyry monoliths organized into two separate quadrangles, is called Sum 'bug rdo ring (gSum 'bug) after an abandoned gzhi ma located below it.[4]

The larger of the two quadrilateral arrays of standing stones is located to the west and contains approximately 800 menhirs oriented to the cardinal directions. The stones were placed in neat rows with their two broad sides facing north and south, although they lose some of their coherence in the sections of the quadrangle containing shorter stones.[5]

While the longer monoliths are tabular, the short ones have a pyramidal appearance. The shorter stones appear to be naturally occurring, unlike the longer ones which were quarried and hewn into shape. The crudely cut appearance of the stones suggests that primitive tools were used. The rough texture and cut of the stelae contrast with a far more refined site of standing stones nearby. The character of the ancient monument is remarkably well-preserved. Despite the social and political dislocations which have beset the region, the Sum 'bug rdo ring was never targeted for destruction.



Sum 'bug rdo ring

Between the two quadrangles is an isolated row of eight of the largest monoliths at Sum 'bug. This row of stones is parallel to the east side of the west quadrangle at a distance of 4.5 meters. Six of the stones are in situ and two have been uprooted. The tallest standing rdo ring rises 116 centimeters out of the ground and the longest downed stone is 145 centimeters in length and is the longest fully visible specimen at Sum 'bug. Another quadrilateral arrangement of stones begins approximately 55 meters east of the west quadrangle. This east quadrangle is roughly 12 by 16 meters in size. Its dimensions could not be accurately gauged because the stones have been heavily disturbed. The east quadrangle is much sparser with only about 150 stones in total and a good percentage of these are no longer anchored into the ground. The rdo ring (stelae, monolith, menhir) of the western quadrangle protrude an average of 25 to 50 centimeters out of the surface of the ground, but there are more than 50 stones exceeding 60 centimeters in stature. The longest monoliths are mostly grouped in the southeast corner of the quadrangle. The tallest stone sticks 95 centimeters out of the ground and an uprooted stone is 115 centimeters in length. Conversely, the shortest stones are less than 12 centimeters tall. Some dislodged stones have been piled up in the middle of the quadrangle. Again, the stones are aligned in the cardinal directions. The effect of gravity over many centuries has caused the majority of the stones in both quadrangles to be tilted towards the incline of the shelf on which they rest.

Between the two quadrangles of rdo ring are the ruins of a structure measuring about ten meters from north to south, and 5.5 meters from east to west. A similarly shaped, larger structure is found west of the west quadrangle two meters beyond the nearest rdo ring. These two structures were also built of porphyry. The two ruined structures have the same alignment as the standing stones. From the stones scattered about these structures, we can deduce that they stood high above the ground level. The style of construction and the type of foundations is not discernible from a visual appraisal. An undetermined portion of them lies buried under piles of stone and rubble.

A variety of megalithic sites have been discovered since the 1920s by Western explorers.[6] It has been suggested that they arose out of a Megalithic culture that had its roots in the Neolithic (Tucci 1973: 57,58).[7] rDo ring. the Megalithic site most resembling Sum 'bug, was discovered by Roerich's Central Asiatic expedition in gNam ru province, 80 kilometers northwest of gNam mtsho.[8]

Sites similar to rDo ring were discovered at Rati (east of Shen rtsa), south of Ngang rtse mtsho, and at Lapchung and Tsukchung in the trans-Himalaya which were composed of cromlechs, alignments of standing stones and stone arrowheads (Roerich 1967: 26). Roerich provisionally dated these megalithic monuments to the late Neolithic or Bronze Age (Roerich 1967: 27). The great commonality between the Sum 'bug and gNam ru rdo ring sites is their linear arrays of menhirs. However, there are no cromlechs at Sum 'bug nor structural ruins reported at gNam ru. The parallels between Sum 'bug, gNam ru and the other three sites discovered on the Byang thang by Roerich are likely to be chronological and functional. Given the variability in the morphology of the sites,

diverse purposes could have been behind their construction.

Until the mid-20th century, directly below the Sum 'bug megalithic site a gzhi ma of the same name existed. It was noted in a the map of the region compiled by Sven Hedin under the name "Sumbuk" (Maps vol.I: Camp CL-CLXIV). The 'brog pa who lived here abandoned the small settlement and moved across the rTa rgo gtsang po to the settlement of Kya rgan, where, until the Communist period, the local sGar dpon of the Se zhig sub-camp resided. There are several people still residing at Kya rgan who were originally from Sum 'bug and who vividly remember the move to the opposite bank of the river. Reportedly, the inhabitants of Sum 'bug had experienced bad dreams and other untoward happenings, eventually compelling them to retreat from the settlement. These negative signs were thought to relate to the megalithic site, which was considered an insalubrious place. Apparently, nothing else of its identity has survived in the memories of the people. The oldest woman interviewed, an octogenarian, reported that when she was a youth living at Sum 'bug, a human skull and other bones were washed out of a gully below the megalithic site.

The presence of human remains at Sum 'bug rdo ring and its ill-omened reputation indicate it is a long forgotten funerary monument.[9] In Tibet and Central Asia, standing stones are indeed associated with ancient graves. The monoliths of Sum 'bug rdo ring might have been erected individually or en masse as a cult funerary monument. The dead may have been disposed of through cremation or sky burial (bya gtor).[10] The structures accompanying the rdo ring appear to be the superstructures of graves or cists. Presumably, this is where the leadership or aristocracy were interred. Unfortunately, no literature or tradition in Bon has been found that sheds light on Sum 'bug, which may indicate that Sum 'bug is a pre-Bon monument.

Row after row of the stones conform to the cardinal directions, a reflection of the cosmological beliefs of the builders. Dominating the view to the south from Sum 'bug across the rTa rgo gtsang po is rTa rgo dge rgan, the chief holy mountain. The ancestral function of the mountain played a role in the location of the monument. The site is downstream from the confluence, a position which in Tibetan geomancy corresponds with the diffusion of natural energies of the elements, as might befit funerary practices concerned with the transmigration of the soul.[11]

Immediately to the north of the old settlement of Sum 'bug the trail traverses a narrow ledge between the cliffs of the rTa rgo gtsang po and the precipitous foot of a red mountain to the east of the river. This topographical constriction is called Lug gtug 'phrang (the Narrow Passage that Sheep Touch) and is said to be the middle of rTa go rin po che's back (rgyab gung). To the north of Lug gtug 'phrang is a vast plain called Sang rgyas thang (Sang rgye thang), 40 kilometers long and as much as 18 kilometers wide. A look at this plain readily explains why Nag tshang is nicknamed Byang sa rgyab stong (Empty Hinterland of the North). In the southern portion of the Byang thang, Sang rgyas thang is one of the premier habitats for gazelle and rkyang which are still fairly numerous. Their grace, speed and agility are unforgettable. The best panoramic

views of the rTa rgo range are had from the Sang rgyas thang, where it can be beheld in all its grandeur.

At the very start of the Sang rgyas thang, at the juncture of the plain and Lug gtug 'phrang, is the Lug gtug 'phrang rdo ring site, a non-megalithic site. It consists of four monoliths in a row, parallel to the river, very near the edge of the cliff that plunges into the water. Three of the stones are about one meter tall and the fourth is 1.7 meters tall. These monoliths are considered offerings to rTa rgo dge rgan and help to protect the Sang rgyas thang, which opens up down stream of them. Votive offerings of small stones and strips of cloth demonstrate the sacred status of the monoliths.

These pink monoliths were mined from the adjacent porphyry deposits of Lug gtug 'phrang. They are more refined than the specimens at Sum 'bug, indicating that they were made with more sophisticated tools. They are so close to the steep bank of the rTa rgo gtsang po because of erosion. The setting of the stelae lacks the eminence or topographical uniqueness ordinarily associated with shrines to rTa rgo or his retinue. It is therefore doubtful that they were originally erected as a shrine. They may have functioned as boundary markers, since they are located in a natural bottleneck near the southern frontier of Nag tshang.

To Dang ra g.yu mtsho

Near the eastern margin of the Sang rgyas plain, about half-way between Lug gtug 'phrang and the southern extremity of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, are two sites: bsLe kham pa rdo ring, which is a single stela or megalith made from a light-colored stone, and rDo rang, which is purportedly that of a Zhang zhung era monastery. According to locals, the ruins of rDo rang are still discernible in an escarpment. The population on the Sang rgyas plain is concentrated on its eastern margin, because of the availability of water originating from the mountains bounding Sang rgyas thang to the east. Other reasons builders chose the fringe of the plain is protection from the brunt of the wind, as well as the presence of naturally-irrigated winter pastures and stone for construction.

Near the eastern edge of the Sang rgyas plain and north of the two archaeological sites is 'Dam khung shang or bsTar sgo (sic rTa rgo) shang, the township headquarters of the region. It is connected to a motorable road that leads north via the rGya sgog and sKye ba townships to Nyi ma county. Also on the Sang rgyas plain are a number of small 'brog pa gzhi ma, the smallest of which support only a single small mud brick house. An example of these is Krang rna, located near a bluff overlooking the rTa rgo gtsang po. As is often the case, the resident family at Krang rna spends more time in their tent than in their diminutive house, which is mainly used to store grain. The trend in the region, as in most other parts of the Byang thang, is towards the construction of more permanent domiciles, which in this area are built with the assistance of carpenters and masons from agricultural villages in Ngam ring county.

Approximately eight kilometers east of the southern tip of the Dang ra g.yu mtsho

is a seasonal 'brog pa camp named rNga sgor sgor (Round Drum) or lNga sgor sgor (Five Circles). It overlooks the confluence of two streams that empty into the rTa rgo gtsang po, and is dominated by a field of granite boulders in the midst of a barren plain. Viewed from the bank of the rTa rgo gtsang po, the boulder field forms a triangular pattern with its apex pointing directly towards rTa rgo dge rgan.[12] rNga sgor sgor is located on an imaginary line between rTa rgo dge rgan and the sGrub khang at Dang ra g.yu bun monastery, the repositories of the primary soul forces of rTa rgo and Dang ra respectively. Whether this alignment was intended is not known. However, it is implausible that the physical orientation of rNga sgor sgor to the hearts of the Dyad would have escaped notice.

Repeated enquiry did not turn up any tradition or mythology related to rNga sgor sgor. If they do exist, they are preserved by the families that use rNga sgor sgor as a transit camp. The sanctity of the site is revealed in the six syllable mantra carved in several of the boulders. These highly eroded carvings must date back centuries. On the surfaces of some boulders are indistinct markings, but whether these were man-made or naturally occurring could not be ascertained. The geomantic configuration of the site indicates that it has been invested with sacred connotations and it cannot be ruled out that some of the boulders were transported.

North of the mouth of the rTa rgo gtsang po, and inland from the east shore of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, is the 'brog pa settlement of Long kyog which consists of two homes. North of this is a little larger gzhi ma called 'Dzo gzhi. Most pilgrims on this stretch of the mtsho 'khor move several kilometers away from the lake-shore to the foot of the range that encloses the Dang ra basin on the east, because lodging and potable water can be found here. By contrast, the southeast shore of the lake is dry, windswept and uninhabited. North of 'Dzo gzhi, at the base of the range, is the settlement and home of gNyan dmar, a servant or manifestation of rTa rgo rin po che (see Chapter Seven). Reportedly, the shrine of this deity contains a large monolithic rock. According to local informants, agriculture was formerly practiced at gNyan dmar, the first of a series of defunct agricultural settlements. North of gNyan dmar, also at the margin of the range, is the 'brog pa settlement of Dib las.

As one travels north, the plain bounding Dang ra g.yu mtsho narrows as the eastern range of mountains joins the lake. North of Dib las is an escarpment called Yon rtse (Summit of Mystic Properties) and north of Yon rtse is the escarpment of Lhun po rtse (Mountain Peak) which contains a cave used as a retreat place for monks from Phyug 'tsho. Shelves below the escarpments correspond to the topographical conditions prevailing at ancient agricultural sites found at Dang ra g.yu mtsho.

Phyug 'tsho

Several kilometers north of Lhun po rtse, and 30 kilometers north of the southern tip of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, is the village of Phyug 'tsho (also spelled Phyug tsho). Phyug 'tsho is the second largest agricultural village at Dang ra with approximately 60 homes built of reddish mud bricks. Stone for construction is scarce and can only be spared for the foundations of buildings. An almost impassable road links the village with the township headquarters at 'Dam khung but, due to its poor condition, most transport involves yaks and horses. Phyug 'tsho is situated on a perennial river called rDo dmar 'bab chu which provides water for irrigation. The village is divided into three sections: 1) dGon pa—the upper section of the village near the monastery; 2) Chub lho—the south side of the rDo dmar 'bab chu; and 3) Chub byang—the north side of the rDo dmar 'bab chu. Irrigation water for the fields of Chub lho comes from a channel which begins about one kilometer upstream from the village. The head of the irrigation channel for Chub byang is located in the mouth of the gorge that debouches onto a flood plain adjacent to Phyug 'tsho. As much as two thirds of the total volume of the stream is diverted into these two irrigation channels during the growing season.

The agricultural produce of Phyug 'tsho is identical to that of the other agricultural villages of Dang ra g.yu mtsho: barley, radishes and turnips. The village, situated a maximum of 200 meters above the 4,535-meter-high Dang ra, is at the very upper extent of agriculture in Tibet and the entire world.[13] This explains why peas, wheat, and mustard—three mainstays of Tibetan plateau agriculture—do not thrive here. The other agricultural villages of Dang ra g.yu mtsho and Dang chung mtsho notwithstanding, the nearest agricultural region is located in Ngam ring county nearly 200 kilometers distant. Phyug 'tsho and the other agrarian villages of Dang ra constitute the most remote farming enclave in Tibet.[14] Agriculture at Dang ra (one of only three places on the Byang thang where it is practiced) is made possible by of the relatively low elevation of the region and the moderating influence of the lake on the area's climate, creating a relatively mild microclimate. Both sowing and reaping at Phyug 'tsho and the other villages of Dang ra are done late.[15]

In addition to agriculture, another uncommon feature of the other agrarian villages of the east side of Dang ra is the presence of dwarfed willow trees. At Phyug 'tsho they grow in several small copses in the flood plain of the rDo dmar bab chu and are used for the construction of buildings and implements. Fuel is in short supply in Phyug 'tsho and comes primarily from animal dung and yo mo, a woody plant that grows in the open plains.

Local elders maintain that deer used to live in the region. Deer are important to the mythology of the Divine Dyads and are a high status animal on the Byang thang. The oral histories of both gNam mtsho and Dang ra g.yu mtsho corroborate the existence of deer, which is depicted in Byang thang cave art.

The yul lha of Phyug 'tsho is 'Dre'u dmar, the red mule of Srid pa'i rgyal mo and the most common mount of this famed protectress of Bon. The rten mkhar of 'Dre'u dmar is located above the monastery at the upper limit of the village. The small, simply built

rten mkhar is an excellent example of what the Bon po term a gsas mkhar (sad mkhar). The Venerable Tshul khrims rnam rgyal asserts that 'Dre'u dmar belongs to the lha btsan class of deities. Like other sa bdag, it has a limited life span and will be destroyed with the earth.[16]

Above the place where the rDo dmar 'bab chu debouches from the gorge on to the Phyug 'tsho plain is a small cave complex called dGon gsar (New Monastery), which was once used as a retreat center. Further afield from the village is a sacred site called bLa ma g.yung drung grags mang rje. The most important holy site is the Phyug 'tsho dgon pa, the full name of which is mThar btsan smin grol gling (the Monastery of the Ultimate Doctrine of Salvation), a branch of the g.Yung drung gling monastery of gTsang. Phyug 'tsho is one of four Bon monasteries still active at the Dyad site. The monastery occupied three different sites in the upper village, but was totally destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. Before the Cultural Revolution, it had as many as 30 to 50 monks attached to it. It was rebuilt about a decade ago and now has only a tiny contingent of monks. Its head is an incarnate monk named bsTan 'dzin g.yung drung, better known as Phyug 'tsho rin po che, who is about 20 years of age. The main protectors of Phyug 'tsho dgon pa are reportedly Srid pai rgyal mo and Shel khrab.[17]

The rudimentarily rebuilt dgon pa stands on the foundation of the old mgon khang, its thin wooden rafters and beams and adobe walls were not built to withstand more than a few generations. Like many agricultural communities of western Tibet, the impoverishment of Phyug 'tsho at the hands of the Red Guards is irreparable in the current socioeconomic conditions. Beside the existing structures of the monastery are traces of the pre-Cultural Revolution 'du khang. Today, the monastic complex is comprised of three small chapels: the 'du khang, mgon khang and the bKa' brgyur lha khang, austere in contents and ornamentation, a mere shadow of their former wealth. Outside of the chapels are both inner and outer courtyards. The outer courtyard is the venue for the dgon pa's two annual 'cham dances.[18] The monks live in their own residences scattered in the vicinity of the monastery. Two of these residences have been built over the ruins of the old bla brang. Adjacent to the ruins of another chapel, a ma ni lha khang has been built in the last few years.

From the village of Phyug 'tsho, the mtsho skor lam gradually ascends a series of terraces which parallel the lake shore. Sven Hedin, during his third unsuccessful attempt to reach Dang ra g.yu mtsho in 1907, realized that similar terraces in the rTa rgo gtsang po valley were vestiges of the shrinking lake shore (Trans-Himalaya,vol. II: 26). During Henry Haden's 1922 journey to Dang ra, he also commented on the lake terraces and thought they might be as old as the Glacial Age in Europe (Hayden and Cosson: 142). Modern investigations prove these observations to be correct. One international study of mNga' ris conducted in the 1980s found that the lakes are shrinking and salinizing, and the ancient shorelines were as much as 200 meters above the present-day lake levels (D. Chang)(see Appendix Seven). These terraces are especially pronounced on the east shore of Dang ra and were important to the ancient settlement patterns of the region.

About one hour's walk north of Phyug 'tsho village is a mchod rten built primarily of unplastered dark stones. This square-shaped mchod rten has a short bum pa and spire, and is surmounted by the bya ru. Within three kilometers of it is Phyug 'tsho grog po, a ruddy-colored rock outcrop located on the north side of a stream called Gung thang klu chu. Three sets of impressive ruins are located at Phyug 'tsho grog po. Today, it is the home base of a single family of shepherds. The largest series of ruins, known as Phyug 'tsho grog po rdzong, occupies the entire outcrop and spills out beyond it. This obscure fort was at one time as large or larger than Lha rtse chos lde rdzong or Phun tshogs gling, two of the major pre-Communist forts of gTsang province.

The fort contains about three dozen dilapidated structures, many of which were multi-roomed and multi-storeyed, mostly stone but some made of mud bricks. While a majority of the structures have square walls, a few have rounded corners, a fairly unusual building technique in Tibet.[19] Along the southern base of the outcrop is an edifice of four or five rooms, including two that are fully intact. According to local informants they functioned as a gzim khang (hostel) for the old fort and are remarkably well preserved. Both the internal and external walls of the structure are made of small, dressed stone blocks. The two complete rooms are each approximately six square meters. One of the two rooms has two small windows (locally called khra ma). In the former there is a one-meter-tall hearth (thab kha) made of mud and stone, with a sophisticated ventilation system built against an outer wall. The rooms were each built with a smoke hole (skar khung) in the roof. In one of the ruined rooms there are four niches (bang khung) in a wall providing significant storage space, and the largest of these is thought by local informants to have once served as an altar.

The most unique architectural feature of the two intact rooms is their all-stone roofs, with the large slabs of stone supported by stone braces that rest on the top of the walls. There are two or three stone braces per wall, which act as the structural template for the radial arrangement of roof slabs. In the room with windows, two of these stone braces span the entire length of the room and thus function as rafters. On top of the roof slabs are smaller stones covered by a layer of mud. The durability of the roofs and walls speak admirably of the skill and ingenuity of the builders.

Very little could be learned about the history of Phyug 'tsho grog po rdzong. The most informed assert that it was founded in the Zhang zhung period and might have remained viable until the Fifth Dalai Lama's incursions into the area. A Mongolian military governor of the Fifth Dalai Lama, dGa' ldan tshe dbang, subjugated Nag tshang and consolidated control over it on behalf of the Lhasa government (La stod 'jam dpal: 259). The tall, precariously-perched walls of the ruined edifices indicate that at least certain portions of the fort are additions, which casts doubt on the claim that it was a Zhang zhung citadel.

Near the outcrop are several nang ra used by 'brog pa who transit the area with their flocks, ranging from long-abandoned ones to one constructed in 1994. Another architectural feature of the site are several ma ni walls. Few sacred geographical traditions

survive at Phyug 'tsho grog po. White blotches on the south side of the outcrop are known as Senge chag rab. The yul lha of the area is named La gshen (sic bLa gshen, Lha gshen?). Nothing of its identity was revealed. The name of the local watercourse, Gung thang klu chu, seems to refer to an ancient cosmogonic deity. It may well belong to the earliest traditions of sacred geography in the region.

West of the fort towards the lake-shore are the ruins of a large mchod rten complex called either mChod rten smug rang or Brum bu nag dpal. Earlier this impressive monument boasted no less than one dozen stupas, some of which were four meters square at the base, the only surviving feature. Like the mchod rten en route from Phyug 'tsho and Phyug 'tsho grog po, the ones at mChod rten smug rang had square bases and were built mostly of dark stones.

Overlooking the fort are the ruins of the Phyug 'tsho grog po Zhang zhung dgon pa. These ruins are believed to be the remains of a Bon monastery founded during the Zhang zhung period. They extend for about 2,000 square meters in a dense agglomeration, an index of its erstwhile size and importance. The stone buildings, oriented to the cardinal directions, seem to be the work of highly skilled craftsmen. There are a few mud brick structures at the monastery, including one shored up with courses of stone. The size of the structures and quality of workmanship proves that there was a tradition of building large complexes at one time. For local residents, this period is synonymous with the Zhang zhung kingdom.[20]

After the passage of 12 or more centuries, it has become very difficult to separate fact from myth in the oral histories of the region. One well-known nun claimed that Dang ra and rTa rgo were home to 60,000 people in the Zhang zhung period—an unrealistically high number. Nevertheless, sites like Phyug 'tsho grog po preserve a very different period of material development and pattern of human inhabitation. The Dyad was a major bastion of civilization on the Byang thang. The challenge is to reveal the character, content and chronology of this civilization.

Evidence for this ubiquitous belief in past glories is to be found in Bon biographical and historical accounts. Numerous great religious personalities, such as the ones who authored the ritual texts devoted to the Dyad, are thought to have lived and practiced at rTa rgo and Dang ra. These accounts, viewed in tandem with archaeology, take on added significance. The glaring historiographic shortcomings of Bon literature, such as the lack of a verifiable chronology or the rendering of historic events in incomprehensible hagiographic and mythological language, has forced scholars to assume an extremely cautious stance.

We know that the Zhang zhung kingdom met its end with the dawn of Tibetan imperial power, but there is little indication of when it was founded. The data available encourages the hypothesis that Zhang zhung was synonymous with Iron Age civilization on the Byang thang. The propinquity of the Bon religion and the Zhang zhung kingdom in literary and oral tradition indicates that the two developed in close association. There is some literary evidence to suggest that early Bon developed out of the Iron Age, hence

during the kingdom of Zhang zhung.[21]

Near the one gzhi ma at Phyug 'tsho grog po a couple of small plots of barley are cultivated, the end of a long legacy of producing food crops. The local people heard from the preceding generation that, long ago, extensive agriculture was practiced at Phyug 'tsho grog po on the plain between mChod rten smug rang and the lake shore. A visual survey of the area revealed swaths of ground covered in vegetation whose color and texture contrasted with the adjoining vegetation. These swaths formed groups whose contours match agricultural parcels. Although the oral histories and visual evidence cannot in itself prove that these were agricultural lands, they are quite convincing in the absence of paleobotanical studies. This historical and empirical evidence tentatively establishes that there was a much larger population at Phyug 'tsho grog po which was capable of producing its own food.[22]

Given the evidence that agriculture developed in the Neolithic in all regions flanking the Byang thang, the same can be expected of the Dyad. If this hypothesis is correct, a theoretical framework should be developed to trace the evolution of sedentary culture and civilization on the Byang thang from the Stone Age. Chronology and the nature of cultural development on the Byang thang must be re-evaluated to accommodate the archaeological discoveries made at the Dyads sites surveyed in this work. The scholarly contention and indigenous belief that Dang ra and rTa rgo are a cradle of Tibetan civilization is increasingly justified.

Around 7,000 years ago, bKra ri gnam mtsho was about 22 meters higher than at present, and was a freshwater lake (Wang Fu-bao et al: 233). Dang ra g.yu mtsho and gNam mtsho, with their more extensive glaciated mountain basins, probably remained freshwater lakes far longer, and to this day they are less salty than bKra ri gnam mtsho. The paleoclimatological evidence indicates that, until the Neolithic or later, human inhabitants of the Dyad sites had the added benefit of living near large, fresh bodies of water. At one time, Dang ra was not only potable, but possibly used to irrigate crops. If we consider Dang ra as a body of fresh water, the region possessed this key environment parameter for the founding of civilization. By the same token, the earliest strata of mythology equating Dang ra with the universal life-giver and protectress becomes more comprehensible if these traditions developed around a viable sweet-water lake.

Other Ancient Communities

About four kilometers north of Phyug 'tsho grog po, and also on the mtsho skor lam, is the village of Lhasa, home base to four families of 'brog pa. The yul lha of Lhasa is Drag sgo dkar po (the Fierce One of the White Portal) or Drag go dkar po (the Fierce White Vulture). Reportedly, an ancient fort existed at Lhasa on the mountain slopes above the village though it seems to have disappeared. Lhasa is the most northerly part of the Dang ra basin under the jurisdiction of 'Dam kung township. In the pre-Communist period, it was the border of the Phyug 'tsho subdivision of the Sang phyug ser gsum

tsho pa. The distance from Lhasa across Dang ra g.yu mtsho is only four kilometers, and is the narrowest section of the lake.

Until roughly 20 years ago Lhasa supported an agricultural community. Now its extensive terraced fields lie fallow, giving the impression of a forlorn and destitute place. At one time they might have supplied grain for more than 100 people. After the widespread failure of the crops, the officials in 'Dam khung township oversaw the relocation of the bulk of the population to Phyug 'tsho, gNyan dmar and other communities on the southeast side of Dang ra.

According to local residents, the failure of crops occurred after the fertility of the land had drastically and inexplicably declined. More than likely it was a cumulative phenomenon with production for decades or centuries, a conclusion supported by the fact that natural fertilizers could not stem the deterioration of the land. Originally, two year-round streams that cut across the broad bench that Lhasa sits on were used to draw irrigation water. Now one of the streams is often dry even during the summer rainy season, and the other one has such a reduced volume that it could possibly water only a small fraction of the former arable land base.[23]

As the climate became drier and colder, agriculture became more problematic. For many centuries the glaciers in the mountains surrounding the Dang ra g.yu mtsho basin and those in the rTa rgo range continued to supply enough water to feed the streams on which agriculture depended. As the glaciers continued to recede, less and less water was available for irrigation. The current shortage of water is compounded by the falling levels of precipitation, which consequently reduce water run off from the mountain catchment areas into the streams.

The systemic degradation of the physical and economic base is the backdrop against which the decline of regional civilization must be viewed.[24] The fall of Zhang zhung, the Mongol invasions and the Fifth Dalai Lama's political consolidation are historical events which impacted the economic and political autonomy of the region. The cause and outcome of these historical perturbations must be related to contemporaneous ecological and climatic conditions, yet environmental history has been ignored. Perhaps the deteriorating physical environment on the Byang thang was the driving force behind the collapse of Zhang zhung.[25]

Proceeding in a counter-clockwise direction from Lhasa one enters the jurisdiction of the rGya sgog township (also spelled rGya rgod), the headquarters of which are located east of Phyug 'tsho grog po and are separated from Dang ra g.yu mtsho by a nearly 6,000-meter-tall range of mountains. In the pre-Communist period, north of Lhasa was the La dpon 'om gsum tsho pa, 'Om bu sub-camp. From Lhasa the mtsho skor lam turns to the east as it follows a 20-kilometer-long bend in the lake shore. This stretch of the circumambulatory trail hugs the base of steep slopes and escarpments that tail off into the lake. Several kilometers from Lhasa is a seasonal 'brog pa camp called Tsan rag with small springs. Reportedly, a Zhang zhung era dgon pa existed somewhere near here, but this could not be verified.

A few kilometers further on is the seasonal encampment of mGar chung, which also has a spring. mGar chung is one of the names of the 5,908-meter-tall peak which is best seen from the west side of the lake.[26] Past the mGar chung camp is a small cave and beyond it is the seasonal camp of Lu zhos with its gushing brook. Several kilometers later there is an esplanade called Am rong, which supports several large seasonal camps. There is a perennial stream at Am rong, an important consideration for the 'brog pa because the water of Dang ra g.yu mtsho is too salty to drink.

One of the most interesting features in the pastoral camps of Am rong is the bee hive-shaped structures used to protect newborn kids and lambs. This indicates that they are used as dpyid sa (spring camps). When these structures are used for kids, they are called ri'u tshang (abode of baby goats) and when they shelter lambs, they are referred to as lug tshang (abode of sheep). These structures are circular and taper towards the top, where there is a hole covered with a stone when the animals are sheltered inside. The lug and ri'u tshang are around 1.5 meters tall. They are found throughout La rgyab and Nag tshang, but not in the gNam mtsho nor Gangs rin po che regions and apparently are unique to the central Byang thang.[27]

One reason for the shape of the lug and ri'u tshang is to keep the animals from crawling out and unwanted creatures from getting in. However, there appear to be more esoteric reasons as well—the circular ground plan is considered pleasing to the klu. The klu can be particularly destructive towards young, vulnerable animals and the construction of a round structure is supposed to act as a kind of charm.

Not far from Am rong is Bas rag, another 'brog pa encampment with a continuously flowing stream. East of Bas rag is dKar lep, beyond which is the seasonal pastoral camp of sNying po (Heart), followed in close succession by Me tog (Flower). Both of these latter camps have year-round watercourses. Only a couple of kilometers from Me tog is sKyid gsum (Three Happinesses), the first active agricultural village and major settlement since Phyug 'tsho. The 50 kilometer walk between sKyid gsum and Phyug 'tsho covers fairly rugged terrain; this and their difference in tsho pa limited intercourse between them. This is upheld today by classification to different townships and the absence of a motorable road linking them.

sKyid gsum is located in a plain situated at the terminus of the east-west bend in the lake shore where the mtsho skor lam again turns to the north. The yul lha of sKyid gsum is Lha ri. His shrine is situated in midst of the village's fields. Unlike Phyug 'tsho, the approximately 12 houses of sKyid gsum have stone walls. In the summer about 15 yak-hair tents are erected by local 'brog pa on the outskirts of the village Many of the village's residents are off to the pastures with their flocks at this time; even in the villages where agriculture is practiced, they depend heavily on livestock for their livelihood. A pass, Ser po la, traverses the range of mountains to the east of sKyid gsum and provides the most direct route to rGya sgog shang. This route is only open to non-vehicular transport. There is no motorable road to sKyid gsum, making it one of the most remote settlements at Dang ra g.yu mtsho.

The name this village is reportedly derived from Ar pa'i rdzong, Gyang rdzong and Grag chung rdzong, the three forts which once existed in the vicinity of the village. The ruins of Ar pa'i rdzong are located west of the village on a rocky bluff overlooking the lake. The ruins comprise scattered piles of rubble and, from a visual survey alone, almost none of their original character could be discerned. Gyang rdzong, situated on the summit of a small conical hill south of the village, is very small. According to some residents, these forts belong to the Zhang zhung period. The political history of the village did not end with Zhang zhung and forts could have been rebuilt or sustained throughout the historical period.

During the Imperial period the relatively populous stronghold of Dang ra g.yu mtsho probably contributed significantly to the military expansion of Tibet into Central Asia. We can speculate that the region was logistically important to Tibetan imperialism due to its superior natural resources and dense population. This is supported by the *bKa' gyur ldc mig*, which records that at the time of King Khri srong lde btsan a regiment of Byang thang 'brog pa were deployed to guard the border of Tibet and China (Vitali 1996: 432,433). The training, recruitment and garrisoning of troops in the region during the Imperial period all seem like strong possibilities. Unfortunately, very little of the region's history is known and we can only speak in terms of the general political development of the Byang thang.[28]

In considering the impact of larger historical events on the region the period of Sa skya ascendancy must be cited. The Sa skya pa and their Mongol overlords retained control of sparsely populated Nag tshang through a system of vassalage.[29] The Sa skya feudatory of the region, the sTag sna rdzong pa, might have chosen Dang ra g.yu mtsho, the only agricultural region in Nag tshang, as a place from which to exercise their political power. Again this would entail building or maintaining forts, estates or other monumental structures like those we see at sKyid gsum.[30]

In the Iron Bird Year (1681), the Fifth Dalai Lama appointed dGa' ldan tshe dbang as military governor of western Tibet to subdue Nag tshang (La stod 'jam dpal: 259). Until the annexation of the region by dGa' ldan tshe dbang, a viable fort or forts might have survived at sKyid gsum. Even with the region firmly under the control of a centralized government, the custom of maintaining forts may have continued.

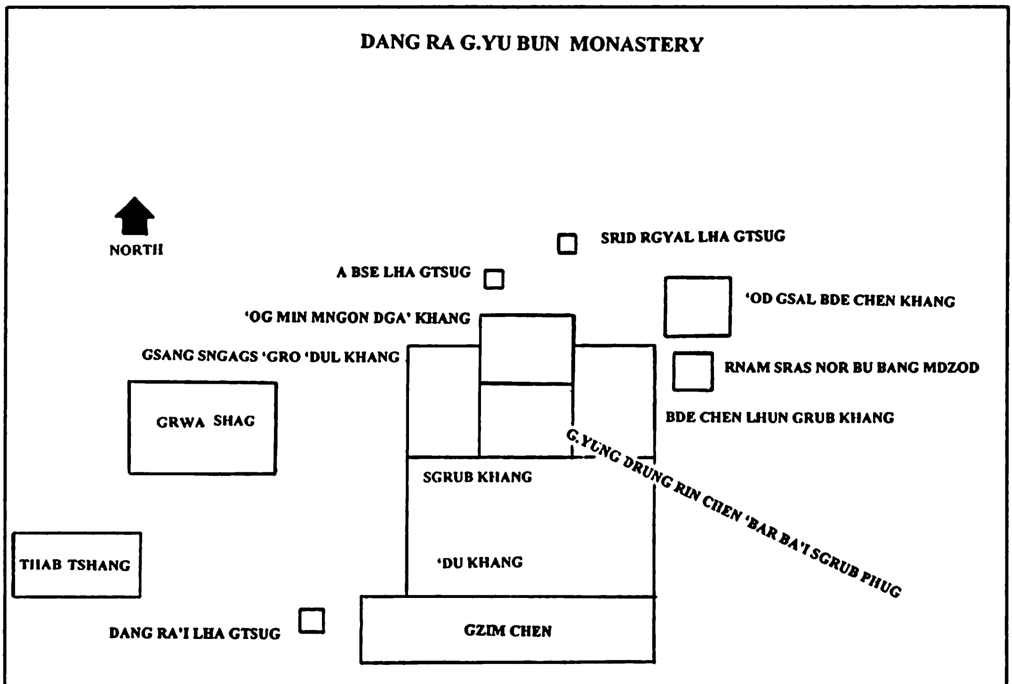
About three kilometers north of sKyid gsum is the agricultural settlement of La lung which belongs to the residents of sKyid gsum. Local people allege that La lung was one of the main religious centers at Dang ra g.yu mtsho during the Zhang zhung period. There is a sacred cave in the escarpment behind the settlement that reportedly had a hermitage built around it. There is some indication that the agricultural base of La lung was much larger in the past. Beyond the cultivated parcels is land with the same topography and soil, which is divided by the remainder of the retaining walls. As with other places at Dang ra g.yu mtsho, the shrinking agricultural base of La lung is almost certainly connected to a dwindling water supply. It also appears that the

settlement once had its own houses. There is an exceptional stone at La lung called Pha bong 'khar rnga (the Bell-Metal Drum Boulder) which is said to sound like a gong when struck. It is thought to be the personal property of the goddess Dang ra rgyal mo.

The settlement of 'Jag lung, north of La lung, also has agricultural holdings which are not currently exploited. Close to 'Jag lung on the sacred circuit around the lake is 'Jag chung, which has a small spring. The trail now ascends into the precipitous slopes that tower above the lake. The trail connects three vales that are interspersed in slopes suspended a couple of hundred meters above Dang ra. Approaching from the south the first of these vales is called gSum rong. The next one, Gyam bu, appears to have ruins of archaeological interest, although very little is left of them.

g.Yu bun Monastery

About two kilometers from Gyam bu is the largest of three vales, the site of the Dang ra g.Yu bun dgon pa. The way is marked by several boulders with the Bon mantra A A' dkar sa le 'od A yang Om' 'du inscribed into them. This is the mantra of the deity gShen lha 'od kar and is used in his Guru yoga practice.[31] The monastery's full name is Dang ra g.Yu bun bshad sgrub grags rgyas gling (the Turquoise Mist Monastery at Dang ra of the Declaration of Expanding Celebrated Meditation).[32] It is also called g.Yu bun sgrub sde (the Turquoise Mist Meditation Center). It is situated on the steep slopes of the north side of the valley perched about 250 meters above Dang ra. The monastery has



nearly 20 monks and novitiates attached to it, making it the largest at the Dyad, with the possible exception of Se zhig dgon pa.

Of the four Bon po monasteries at the Dyad, Dang ra g.Yu bun occupies the most dramatic setting. The cliff it clings to, made up of large slabs of rock, is called dBal mo brag after the 27 cosmogonic sisters who hatched from eggs and gave rise to the host of gods, demons, humans, animals and other beings. The dgon pa, built in tiers, is thought to be a manifestation of g.Yung drung dgu brtsegs, the Bon primordial mountain. It is said to have been founded in the middle part of Zhang zhung, in the paradise of existence (srid pa'i zhing khams) and to repose in the heart of the universe (cf. Nag chu sa khul: 580).

The belief that Dang ra g.yu Bon commands the very center of the universe helps make the monastery one of the most estimable for the Bon po. Although it is in a remote area, its reputation permeates all corners of the Bon po world. The supremacy of the site and its geomantic perfection are due to the fact that at the very center of the monastery is the sGrub khang, the soul cave of Dang ra g.yu mtsho and the heart of the anthropomorphized Dang ra rgyal mo. The identification of Dang ra g.yu bun with the center of the Bon cosmos appears to be an adaptation of this aboriginal mytho-religious complex. The heart of Dang ra rgyal mo, the progenitrix of the universe in the aboriginal religion, became assimilated with the Bon primordial mountain g.Yung drung dgu brtsegs and the 27 cosmogonic dbal mo.

The foundation of a religious center at the site is traditionally attributed to the second Yar lung king, Mu khri btsan po. Two of the 37 'du gnas chen established by Mu khri btsan po were located at Dang ra g.yu bun and Gangs gnyan rta rgo (cf. Nag chu sa khul: 580). Only one of the 37 'du gnas chen was situated at gNam mtsho, indicating that this Dyad site was more important to early Bon history. This is also reflected in the conjugal relations between the two members of each Dyad and in the archaeological record. Dang ra g.Yu bun monastery was established by the Zhang zhung saint Sad ne ga'u, as recorded in the *sPyi spung khro bo dbang chen* (Nag chu sa khul: 580).[33] Sad ne ga'u and his disciple Thad mi thod ke are among the Thirteen Lineage Holders initiated by the rgyal gshen (royal priest) King Mu khri btsan po (Karmay 1972: 74). This is corroborated by the *rNam bshad gsal sgron* which states that g.Yu bun is a place where the Thirteen Lineage Holders and Four Sages practiced (Dagkar: Ms-A).

Local tradition maintains that, since the time of Sad ne ga'u, g.Yu bun has had an uninterrupted existence as a Bon monastic center. If this is true, the monastery is one of the oldest continually inhabited religious sites in Tibet. Moreover, a site boasting the geomantic pre-eminence of g.Yu bun must long predate the Bon religion and extend back to the dawn of human existence on the Byang thang.

Subsequent to Sad ne ga'u, many other practitioners of the A rdzogs snyan gsum (the three Bon lineages of rDzogs chen) lived at g.Yu bun. Subsequently the monastery came under the charge of itinerant and highly realized spiritual masters (Nag chu sa khul: 581). Circa 1687, in the 12th rab byung, mTshungs med rnam dag tshul khrim took

on it. Dung dkar ri is the border between the rGya sgog and 'Om bu townships. In the vicinity of Dung dkar ri is a cave called A 'dos phug, which reportedly has a small entrance with a number of chambers inside. According to local tradition, this is where the Bon adept Dwang ra (sic Dang ra) shes rab rin chen, a rDzogs chen master who probably lived in the 11th to 12th centuries, meditated. North of Dung dkar ri the trail drops sharply down into the Lu snga (Lu sngo?) gtsang po valley (perhaps kLu sngon gtsang po/Blue kLu River?). Near the mtsho skor lam, on a shelf above the river, is a seasonal 'brog pa camp next to a dark rock outcrop called Nag po tshang. Local residents maintain that areas around the Lu snga gtsang po were cultivated in the remote past, evidenced by contrasting sections of vegetation and soil.

On the north side of the Lu snga gtsang po, the circumambulatory trail climbs steeply around a bluff before coming to a naturally-terraced plain called Thang phug. On the north side of this plain is the site of the former Khyung rdzong. Khyung rdzong is one of the most celebrated of all the Zhang zhung sites in Bon literature and folklore. The fort is believed to have stood on the summit of a rock dome called Khyung ri in the center of an approximately 150-meter-tall limestone outcrop. The fort is associated with the Lig mig rgya dynasty, which ruled Zhang zhung until it was annexed by the Yar lung dynasty.

Khyung rdzong and Lig mig rgya (Srid pa'i rje/King of Existence) were first brought to the attention of the outside world by Nain Singh (Nain Singh: 171). The explorer was told about "Limur Gyalbo" (sic Lig mig rgyal po), a powerful and fabulously wealthy king who lived 2,000 years ago and ruled over the entire Hor country.[35] King Lig mig rgya was supposedly overcome in battle by the King of Lhasa, and his golden saddle and turquoise the size of a goat's liver were cast into the lake, where they still remain.

There is some debate as to when the assassination of the last Lig mig rgya king and the fall of Zhang zhung occurred. According to the Tun-huang manuscripts, it transpired during the reign of King Srong btsan sgam po, but Bon texts maintain that it occurred during the reign of King Khri srong lde btsan, a discrepancy of roughly 150 years. sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag provides a possible explanation for this discrepancy.[36] He theorizes that during the time of King Srong btsan sgam po the Lig mig rgya dynasty lost control of Khyung lung dngul mkhar, their capital in far western Tibet, and moved their headquarters to Dang ra Khyung rdzong, where they managed to hold on to power for another century and a half before being defeated by King Khri srong lde btsan.

Only through guile and deceit could sPu rgyal conquer Zhang zhung. The Bon histories *Bon ma nub pa'i gtan tshigs* and *rNam bshad gsal sgron* claim that the army of Zhang zhung was superior to that of sPu rgyal (Dagkar: Ms-C). The *Old Tibetan Chronicle* relates how King Srong btsan sgam po gave his sister, Sad mar kar, to King Lig mig rgya in marriage, and how she treacherously led her husband to his death (Beckwith 1987: 16).[37] In the *bsTan byung ke ta ka'i phreng ba*, the Bon version of the collapse of Zhang zhung (Dagkar: Ms-C), it states that King Lig mig rgya destroyed nearly a quarter of the Tibetan territory after King Khri srong lde btsan abolished Bon. In retaliation, the Tibetan

king sent his minister, sNa nam, to assassinate King Lig mig rgya. sNa nam ambushed the king when he was on his way to Sum pa, after pretending to be faithful and winning King Lig mig rgya's trust.[38]

The native Bon po believe that, with the death of King Lig mig rgya and the fall of Zhang zhung, civilization at Dang ra and rTa rgo collapsed and the physical signs of its former magnificence disappeared. Local Bon po say that the forts, monasteries and palaces that flourished in Zhang zhung were consigned to obscurity.

The problem with Khyung rdzong is that there is little evidence of the former capital of the Lig mig rgya kings. Unlike at Phyug 'tsho grog po or Gyam pa'i rdzong, there are few traces of the ancient infrastructure. The heart of Khyung rdzong is Khyung rdzong ri, which was supposed to have the king's palace on its summit. The ruins of stone walls on the top of Khyung ri are not sufficient for a major fort, and the summit is a very small area which could not have supported a very large palace or fort. On the flanks of Khyung ri and adjoining rock formations are vestiges of a half dozen masonry structures, all of which appear to have been insignificant. If Khyung rdzong was the capital, it was decimated so thoroughly that virtually not a stone was left standing. Earthquakes could have been particularly destructive at the site. For whatever reason, there is little left to indicate that Khyung rdzong was the political center of a large and extensive kingdom.

The Thang phug plain is believed to have been farmed in the Zhang zhung period by certain local residents.The lack of a permanent stream, however, limits the supply of water for irrigation. Today, Khyung rdzong is served by a single small spring as well as several small marshy tracts on Thang phug. Thirteen hundred or more years ago the amount of water at Khyung rdzong must have been greater, but still not enough for more than minimal cultivation.

Beginning in the early 12th century, the ancient citadel re-emerges as an important Bon center. Under the new assimilated Bon, Khyung rdzong came to prominence as a site where scriptural and other kinds of sacred treasures were discovered.[39] In 1108 rMa ston srol 'dzin (b. 1092) discovered the sacred texts belonging to the Recent Treasury (gSar gter) which were probably hidden during the time of King Khri srong lde btsan (Dagkar Ms-A).[40]

There is a legend that a cliff three to four meters tall, which collapsed in a recent earthquake, concealed magical weapons used for subduing evil spirits (Ma 1991: 65). Residents of Dang ra allege that the discovery of treasures at Khyung rdzong was an ongoing process from the time of rMa ston srol 'dzin until recently.

According to Grub dbang bstan 'dzin rin chen's autobiography, he received a fabulous vision at Dang ra Khyung rdzong (pp. 286,287). While he was there, he saw Sad ne ga'u and a huge host of siddhas and dakinis making a tshogs offering. Sad ne ga'u was attired in a diaphanous white gown, wore his hair in a bun and had a long beard. From Sad ne ga'u he received spyi spungs (tantric) initiations and transmission of sacred rituals. Sad ne ga'u told him that he was an extraordinary person and encouraged him to practice faithfully because the teachings given him were the essence

of the power of all the wrathful and peaceful deities and the essence of the mind of the buddhas of the 10 directions. The ancient master also told him that bestowed on him were the blessings of the dakinis, the teachings of the bodhisattvas, the kindness of all the lamas, the hook for liberating self and others, the great Mahayana and the character of the lofty spiritual lands. Grub dbang btsan 'dzin was then reminded that the lineage he had received was unbroken, and that it was wished that he liberate sentient beings. Finally, Sad ne ga'u gave him general mantras of the spyi spungs tradition.

Next to Khyung ri is another large rock outcrop called Brag bong ya, a dwelling place of local protector deities. There is a circumambulatory trail skirting the base of Khyung ri, Brag bong ya and the smaller adjacent formations. The upper most part of Khyung rdzong is called Sha ma la and is situated on the east side of the outcropping. Proceeding in a counter-clockwise direction from Sha ma la the trail makes a steep descent to a shelf located on the north side of Khyung ri. This shelf is simply called sKor rgyab (Back of the Circuit), in the middle of which sits a red and white mchod rten topped with a pair of yak horns. North of sKor rgyab is another large rock outcrop called dKar yos brag. Advancing from sKor rgyab the circumambulatory trail passes a series of clefts in the cliffs called sdig pa'i 'dzul khung which are used as a test of a pilgrim's virtue. Rounding the west side of the skor lam is a rock face with rang byung mantras inscribed in it. Past these miraculous manifestations is a zhabs rjes of gShen rab mi bo che, followed by a zhabs rjes of the hoof of yak, possibly a manifestation of Dang ra g.yu mtsho. West of the zhabs rjes is a small black boulder with two protuberances outlined in red which are said to represent Gangs ti se and mTsho ma pham.

A little further along, suspended above the Khyung rdzong skor lam, is a large overhang called dKar mo stong yang. As one rounds the south side of the trail, a small red mchod rten is encountered on the outside of the circuit. Opposite this mchod rten in the rocks is a cave called Khyung rdzong sgrub khang, the ritual heart of Khyung rdzong. A boulder protecting the entrance to the cave is inscribed with a six syllable and an eight syllable mantra. Below the Khyung rdzong sgrub khang, sacred water oozes from a rock called Me 'bar chu which is associated with the wrathful protector sTag lha me 'bar. Near this holy water, on the rock face, is a rang byung image of sTag lha me 'bar.

The next gnas chen on the Khyung rdzong circuit is the Dran pa nam mkha'i sgrub phug, a cave where the great Bon lama Dran pa nam mkha' (b. 753) is said to have meditated. This cave is still used as a retreat. Circa 785, with the permission of King Khri srong lde btsan, Dran pa nam mkha' and the Nine Magicians classified all the Bon texts and secreted them in 37 groups, including one at rTa rgo rin po che (Karmay 1972: 93-97). The son of rMa ston srol 'dzin, rMa lcam ne, was believed to be a manifestation of Dran pa nam mkha' (Karmay 1972: 169). Beside the Dran pa nam mkha'i sgrub phug are the ruins of a small hermitage and below it is a cave called sGom chen. On the sacred circuit around Khyung rdzong is one more cave, the bDe ldan gser chung. On the southeast side of the Khyung rdzong skor lam is a shrine from whence it is a short climb back to Sha ma la.

In the Vicinity of Gangs lung

North of Khyung rdzong is another pass called Khyung la connected to the Sha ma la by a saddle. The north side of the Khyung la abruptly descends about 250 vertical meters to Ba ma thang, a terraced plain about eight kilometers long abutting Dang ra g.yu mtsho. On the north edge of Ba ma thang is a small pass on the circumambulatory trail called Ga ra la. In the vicinity of Ga ra la is reportedly a zhabs rjes of gShen rab mi bo che. To the east of Ga ra la, on the crest of the range separating the Dang ra g.yu mtsho basin from the Ngang rtse mtsho basin, is a pass named mNa' ur la.[41] North of the Ga ra la is a stream called Dar chung chu which has a ma ni wall built above it. North of the Dar chung chu is the Dar chen chu. It is averred by local people that the extensive terraces on the Dar chung and Dar chen streams were once cultivated.

Above the mtsho skor lam, in the vicinity of Dar chung chu and Dar chen chu, is the Dang ra'i rten sgam, which is considered the single most important shrine to Dang ra rgyal mo/Dang ra las kyi dbang mo at the lake. Offerings made here are thought to be very propitious and the shrine is said to have wish-fulfilling properties. Near the Dang ra'i rten sgam, at a site called g.Yang phywa, is another shrine called Pha bong na rag sdug 'joms (the Stone that Steadfastly Protects from the Oppression of Misery), which is believed to cure ailments by rubbing the afflicted part of the body against the stone of the shrine.

Another nearby shrine is Pha bong gri rdor (the Stone to Sharpen the Knife On), which is supposed to be efficacious in removing sins accrued by butchering animals. sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag says that knives used to butcher animals are sharpened here in belief that the animals killed with these knives will enjoy a higher rebirth. There is little doctrinal support for such a belief, but it serves the vital function of assuaging the conscience. Also in the area is the 'Brug 'gro ba 'dren site featuring a self-manifested dragon in stone and a mystic site called Dang ra'i sgo lcag (Dang ra's Lock).

North of Dar chen chu on the circumambulatory trail is a field of light-colored granite boulders covered with a rust-colored deposit. Several of the boulders have the six syllable mantra carved on them. The six syllable mantra occurs at several places on the Dang ra g.yu mtsho pilgrimage circuit despite the region being a Bon stronghold. There is a feeling among some native historians that it signifies a cultural intrusion sponsored by the Fifth Dalai Lama. It is plausible that, during the unification of Tibet under the Fifth Dalai Lama, the cult of sPyan ras gzigs was robustly introduced into the region. It is known that the Bon po were persecuted at this time (cf. Karmay 1975: 186).

The most skilfully executed carving in the vicinity is one consisting of two interconnected rosettes, each with the eight syllable mantra arranged in them radially. The first syllable of the mantra, the quinquepartite Om', is located in the middle of the rosette, and between the two rosettes is a crescent and nor bu design. On another stone a Bon mchod rten was engraved with the syllables A and Om' in its pedestal. The wear on this carving indicates that it is many centuries old. This mchod rten is very similar in

design to one found in the Brag ching gur phug at bKra shis do chen (see Chapter Four, fig. 26). On another boulder, the mantra bswo brum A dkar mu la ting nam 'od 'du mu ye tshe rni dza is engraved.[42] On another rock is the mantra A' dkar A rmad du tri su nag po zhi zhi mal mal.[43]

Beside the engravings are two stone sheds called rten sgam (support boxes) which are shrines similar in function to the rten mkhar or gsas mkhar. The rten sgam are rectangular in shape, open on the side facing the mtsho skor and are about 1.4 meters tall. The roofs are made of stone slabs resting on the walls and are covered by smaller stones. The larger of the two rten sgam houses, the Sha 'gro ba 'dren, is a dark grey and white boulder with a self-formed deer. Adjacent to the shrine is a prayer flag mast. The smaller rten sgam is the rDo 'gro ba 'dren, which is said to have the ability to cure toothaches. A cure is putatively effected by touching the bad tooth to the sacred stone in the rten sgam. On the ground next to the rDo 'gro ba 'dren, the horns of goats and sheep are strewn about. Evidently, when these animals are slaughtered, their horns are offered at the rDo 'gro ba 'dren, perhaps to maintain the health and fecundity of the flocks in the nearby village of Gangs lung.

The stone construction of the rten sgam and the sacred stone objects in the shrines speak of the most primitive stage in the construction of religious monuments. According to sLop dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, the ancient precursor of many shrines, including the gsas mkhar, rten mkhar and mgon khang, is the bya rdang. This scholar adds that the name has no direct association with birds in the Bon tradition. In ancient times, the bya rdang was associated with the protectors of the sNang gshen theg pa, the Bon of apotropaic rites (Norbu 1995: 242,243).

Magical stones, like the ones at Dang ra and throughout the Tibetan world, are often glossed over as being part of folk religion. Beliefs associated with these lithic shrines are often removed from Bon theology, although the 'gro ba 'dren shrines have been assimilated to Bon soteriological concerns. Today the 'gro ba 'dren sites are indexes of transformation along the lake circuit, which itself is a spiritually rejuvenating process. Undoubtedly, the architectural and sentimental character of the shrines are part of an antiquated and distinctly non-lamaist phase of religion in the region.

A couple of hundred meters higher, and many lake terraces apart from the 'Gro ba 'dren shrines, is the village of Gangs lung which has about 10 homes. Gangs lung is located near the upper level of the lake terraces, near the base of an escarpment which forms the foot of the range of mountains bounding the eastern shore of the lake. The village is built on the south bank of the Gangs lung chu, which provides water for irrigation. Towering above the village are the mountains Gangs lung nag tshang and Gangs lung 'dre dkar. The glaciers and watershed of these two mountains provide the life-giving waters of the Gangs lung chu. Gangs lung 'dre dkar is the yul lha of the village, another example of the semi-divine aboriginal form of the 'dre. All of the agricultural holdings of Gangs lung are consistently situated high above Dang ra, making it the most altitudinous agrarian village on the Byang thang.

The usual regional crops—barley, radishes and turnips—are produced in Gangs lung. Residents of the village submit that current agricultural production is a small fraction of what it once was. They allege that large areas of Gangs lung, extending south to Dar chen and which now lie fallow, were farmed in the Zhang zhung period. Vestiges of retaining walls found on some of the uncultivated terraces support these claims. The inhabitants of Gangs lung also report that farming is harder than it was 100 or even 50 years ago because of increasing aridity. The drought cycle is apparently becoming more frequent. According to the local oral history, scrub juniper grew in abundance on the slopes above Gangs lung in the distant past. Due to heavy deforestation and perhaps the changing climate, juniper became extinct in the region.

Agrarian villages at Dang ra like Gangs lung have always occupied the most arid and highest limits of agriculture in Tibet, and environmental conditions were marginal. Oral history indicates that the process of marginalization has been amplified, and that the microclimatic conditions which permit agriculture to be conducted in the region are disappearing.

The houses of Gangs lung are single storey stone buildings with unplastered exterior walls. The ceilings of the houses are made of stone slabs resting on wooden rafters. The stone ceiling slabs are reminiscent of the ones found at Phyug 'tsho grog po. bsTan pa rgyal mtshan, a local sngags pa in his mid-70s, lives in Gangs lung. For generations his family has been entrusted with preserving holy stones and a nor bu which were owned by Dran pa nam mkha'. Other sacred objects preserved by bsTan pa rgyal mtshan include a skull and other relics of Bon saints and a fossilized conch shell the size of a fist (Ma 1991: 53). Against the escarpment on the north side of the Gangs lung chu, and within view of the village, is purportedly the site of a Zhang zhung-era monastery called sGo po rnam gsum.

g.Yung drung lha rtse

The main mtsho skor trail passes below Gangs lung, but an upper branch of it passes through the village and continues in a northerly direction before joining up with the main trail at the village of 'Om bu. On the upper trail, a small mchod rten was recently rebuilt. Approximately half-way between Gangs lung and the next major gnas chen, g.Yung drung lha rtse, is a stream called sGo bdag chu, which watered contiguous fields at one time. The defunct farmland of sGo bdag and its encircling walls are still visible and soundly corroborate this claim.

The long series of terraces on the east side of Dang ra terminate at g.Yung drung lha rtse, the site of several caves and a nearly 1,000-year-old Bon hermitage. Nothing but a few small, crumbling walls at the top end of the site are left. The hermitage was established by gShen rgyal lha rtse, a member of the Zhang zhung snyan brgyud lineage, who lived at the time of the Bon and Buddhist renaissance of the 11th and 12th centuries.

According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, g.Yung drung lha rtse was a thriving religious center. In 1995, the facade of the cave used by gShen rgyal lha rtse was rebuilt and reactivated by rDzogs chen practitioners from sTeng chen. This cave contains an adobe altar which survived the Cultural Revolution.

sLop dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag kindly related the following story of the founding of g.Yung drung lha rtse by gShen rgyal lha rtse.[44] One day the village headman of sKyid gsum was out searching for his stray yaks when he met gShen rgyal lha rtse, a great adept. The headman tried to persuade the saint to return with him to sKyid gsum but he steadfastly refused. In desperation the headman had gShen rgyal lha rtse kidnapped and locked in a temple at sKyid gsum. Soon, however, the headman from sKyid gsum saw the futility of trying to contain the saint and freed him. To make amends for his untoward behavior he agreed to help gShen rgyal lha rtse found a hermitage at g.Yung drung lha rtse. sLob dpon notes that gShen rgyal lha rtse was a teacher of the famous rNying ma rdzogs chen master, Zur chen shag kya 'byung, according to the Bon tradition.

A biography of gShen rgyal lha rtse is found in *rDzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan brgyud kyi brgyud pa'i bla ma'i rnam thar* (Biographies of the Lineage Lamas of the Zhang zhung Oral Lineage Tradition of rDzogs chen).[45] gShen rgyal lha rtse was orphaned as a small boy and his stepmother was very cruel and neglected him. One day he ran away from home with the intent of finding someone to teach him magic so that he could exact revenge on his stepmother. Eventually, he ended up in a village where he was told about the famous and powerful magician and rDzogs chen practitioner dPon chen lhun grub mu thur after hearing the latter's name exclaimed during a game of dice (cho lo). He asked after him and was told that this adept was so powerful that he did not require anyone to look after his livestock because they were magically tended to by a white yak and a white goat. Young gShen rgyal lha rtse was also warned that the adept had two ferocious dogs and that he should not try to approach his house alone. He was advised to wait at the spring for the adept's wife to come and collect water. He dutifully did as he was told and, in due course, met dPon chen lhun grub mu thur's wife. gShen rgyal lha rtse asked the adept's wife to employ him as a servant, which she agreed to do.

With vigor gShen rgyal lha rtse tackled the domestic chores assigned to him. dPon chen lhun grub mu thur, who was away when his wife hired the boy, asked her upon his return home who the boy was and what he wanted. The adept went to the boy and asked the same questions. gShen rgyal lha rtse answered the adept truthfully explaining that he wanted to learn magic in order to seek vengeance on his wicked stepmother. The adept told the boy that this was no problem and that his stepmother could be controlled as easily as an errant yak in a village. He added that with many hands available it is easy to catch a stray yak in a village. gShen rgyal lha rtse then queried the adept about the name of his guru and where he lived. The adept told him that his name was dPon chen btsan po, but would not divulge where he lived. Instead, he offered to take the boy to meet his guru in the First Tibetan Month. Unbeknown to gShen rgyal lha rtse,

the last time dPon chen lhun grub was with dPon chen btsan po, his guru predicted that he would soon meet a very special boy keen on learning magic.

The day came when gShen rgyal lha rtse got to meet dPon chen btsan po. dPon chen btsan po, knowing the mind of the gShen rgyal lha rtse, promised to help him destroy his enemy. Thinking that dPon chen btsan po meant to help him wreck vengeance on his stepmother, the boy was pleased. The guru's real intention was to help gShen rgyal lha rtse destroy his anger towards his stepmother, his real enemy. dPon chen btsan po offered to teach the boy and he went on to become his student.

The guru predicted that gShen rgyal lha rtse would found a monastery called g.Yung drung lha rtse with the aid of a sponsor from sKyid gsum. gShen rgyal lha rtse received a range of teachings and empowerments from his guru. At the completion of his teachings, the guru transformed himself into a cuckoo bird and flew away to rTag gzigs to subdue a srin po. After separating from dPon chen btsan po, gShen rgyal lha rtse proceeded to Shangs shel rong gi brag and practiced rDzogs chen there for three years. He then travelled to g.Yung drung lha rtse where, with the help of his sponsor from sKyid gsum, he built a hermitage. gShen rgyal lha rtse went on to become totally immersed in his practice and, consequently, his anger towards his stepmother completely vanished. Through his practice, many deities became his ally, he reached full enlightenment and attained a rainbow body. He lived for 113 years.

A biography of the successor to gShen rgyal lha rtse, Lha sgom dkar po, is found in the same work.[46] Lha sgom dkar po was born into the 'Or clan. His father was Lo ma ting A tsa ra, a scholar of rGyu'i Bon.[47] Lha sgom dkar po had studied religion as a youth and had reached a certain level of attainment. He had finished his studies at 23 years of age and organized the traditional celebratory feast. In conjunction with the organization of this feast he went out in search of jaggery. After obtaining a horse-load of jaggery, Lha sgom dkar po started back to his home. One night en route, he found shelter with an old childless couple. In the morning he overheard the old man tell his wife to get up and prepare a drink for their guest. The old man then told his wife that afterwards they would go to g.Yung drung lha rtse to make offerings. Lha sgom enquired about g.Yung drung lha rtse and was told that it was the residence of the great lama gShen rgyal lha rtse. Upon hearing the name of this lama, Lha sgom dkar po was overcome with emotion and, instead of returning home, he accompanied the old couple to g.Yung drung lha rtse.

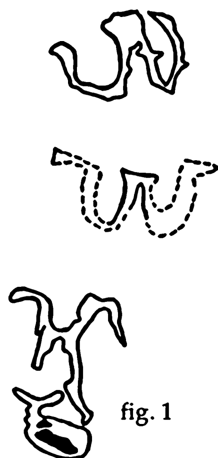
When they arrived, Lha sgom dkar po offered two bolts of cotton cloth and a high quality turquoise to g.Shen rgyal lha rtse, followed by all his other possessions, including his two horses. gShen rgyal lha rtse asked Lha sgom dkar po what he wanted, and he replied, "teachings and empowerments." gShen rgyal entered a meditational state and placed his hands on Lha sgom dkar po's head as a blessing.

Initially, Lha sgom stayed with gShen rgyal lha rtse for three years to study tantra and rDzogs chen. At the end of this period, the teacher scrutinized his pupil for five indices of attainment, requiring an examination of the markings on his body, his

complexion, his character, his name and an analysis of the teacher's dreams concerning his pupil. Lha sgom dkar po excelled in the examinations. Special markings on his body included a path of a khyung on the palm of his left hand and wrinkles on his face that pointed upwards. His complexion was slightly bluish and a little red around the eyes—two positive indications. His name, Lha sgom dkar po, is the name of a yi dam, which was also very good. The character of the pupil was marked by diligence, fortitude and independence, and he proved himself to be a strong individual. gShen rgyal lha rtse remarked that, because of this individualism, he was like the son of a srin po. gShen rgyal lha rtse's dreams about Lha sgom dkar po were also very auspicious. He dreamt about a golden drum being sounded in the four directions, a large conch shell, and other signs of good portent.

Due to his outstanding performance in the examinations, gShen rgyal lha rtse offered Lha sgom dkar po all of the teachings. After receiving the teachings, Lha sgom dkar po became itinerant and visited many places, including Bhutan. Subsequently, Lha sgom dkar po returned to Dang ra g.yu mtsho to meditate in a cave called Brag phug gnam skos chen. Lha sgom dkar po attained many siddhas and lived for 97 years.

On a boulder near g.Yung drung lha rtse, the mantra A' dkar A rmad du tri su nag po zhi zhi mal mal is beautifully carved into the rock. Below it the Buddhist six syllable mantra is engraved, and below that is a more a crudely carved A Om' Hum'. Oriented in a vertical row below the Bon mantra are four engraved figures (see fig.1) very similar to the ones found in the ancillary chamber of the kLu khang at bKra shis do chen.[48] These incondite figures are highly abraded. Their presence in two far-flung areas suggests that these figures were used in a wide geographical context. Through the breadth of their distribution, it appears that these enigmatic symbols represent a discrete stage in the religious development of the Byang thang. Evidence indicates that this symbolism was emblematic of an era of acute conflict between Bon and Buddhism.


fig. 1

'Om bu

From g.Yung drung lha rtse, two different trails head towards 'Om bu, the largest village at Dang ra g.yu mtsho. These converge at two sacred sites. The first of these is Brag btsan 'chib pa (the Mounted Brag btsan), a boulder representing the self-formed yul lha of 'Om bu mounted on a horse. Passers-by place light-colored stones on top of the vividly-colored magenta, teal and vermilion boulder as offerings. The full name of the 'Om bu yul lha is Brag btsan g.yung drung dgra 'dul, which is an epithet of A bse. Brag btsan is usually depicted on a red horse. He is described in some detail in *dBal gsas rnam pa'i sngags sgrub*.[49]

A little beyond the rang byung Brag btsan is the O rgyan sbas lung (the Secret Valley of O rgyan rin po che), a smooth cliff with white striations in it. This formation is supposed to be the gateway to a secret valley that Gu ru rin po che, alias Dran pa nam mkha', will one day open to save his followers from an impending apocalypse. The belief that Dran pa nam mkha' and Gu ru rin po che were in fact the same person pervades Bon beliefs on a non-scholarly level. The close association of the Bon po and Buddhist communities over many centuries naturally encourages these kinds of syncretic beliefs to develop. Descending to the edge of 'Om bu is a boulder with a protuberance called Pha bong gser nya (the Boulder with the Golden Fish). At the base of the escarpment are piles of rubble and the remnants of old foundations, 'Om bu zhang zhung dgon pa. As the name denotes, it is supposed to be the remains of a Zhang zhung era monastery. High above the village to the northeast of the Zhang zhung dgon pa are the ruins of what is called a Zhang zhung fort.[50]

With upwards of 100 houses, 'Om bu[51] is the largest village at the Dyad, and it is also the most prosperous as well. A motorable road, a creation of the Communist period, links the village of 'Om bu to 'Om bu shang, located tens of kilometers away from Dang ra. The township simply appropriated the name of the largest and most famous village under its jurisdiction. The homes are built of stone and are similar in construction to the ones in Gangs lung. The houses of both villages sport distinctive red stripes near the roof line marking their Bon identity. Some of the homes have yak horns crowning their roof top spo btsas.[52] The custom of placing yak horns on the roof may be derived from the ba gam of Zhang zhung, yak and rkyang heads adorning the roof of the Byi ba fort (Dagkar: Ms-C).

The watercourse that runs through the village is called the 'Om bu chu while the next watercourse, several kilometers to the northwest and which also empties into Dang ra, is called 'Om mo chu. In the middle of 'Om bu there is a small ma ni khang. Until the Cultural Revolution, there was a monastery nearby with an assembly hall supported by eight pillars. Its destruction was a catastrophe to regional history and culture as it housed priceless statues and rare manuscripts. It has not been rebuilt, because 'Om bu lacks the resources to undertake reconstruction, which is especially costly in remote areas. The site of the old 'Om bu dgon pa is now covered by houses. 'Om bu also has another monastery, located above the destroyed one which was built and is still run by a lineage of married lamas.[53] The smaller monastery is named g.Yung drung bsam gtan gling (Swastika Meditation Monastery). Its assembly hall needs only six thin supporting pillars.

The monastery is located above a defile formed by the 'Om bu chu. In the pre-Communist period it had approximately 20 affiliated monks and novitiates. Now there are only a few. The dgon pa consists of a 'du khang, ma ni khang, monks' quarters, storage rooms and the residence of Gu ru 'od zer. The highest seat in the assembly hall is reserved for visiting Bon po dignitaries. On the altar is a reliquary mchod rten enshrining the relics of the father of Gu ru 'od zer, bZod pa rgyal mtshan, the third in the monastery's lineage, and small statues of gShen rab mi bo che of the past, present

and future. Flanking the altar is a set of the Bon canon stored in book shelves. There is an evident absence of treasures and heirlooms in the monastery, the result of Tibet's tumultuous history of the last few decades. In the pre-Communist period, under the auspices of the headmen ('go rgan) of 'Om bu, a religious ceremony called the Khro bo dbang chen bum sgrub was held in the First Tibetan Month at the monastery (Nag chu sa khul: 586).

On the rear right wall of the assembly hall, in addition to the mural of Dang ra las kyi dbang mo, are images of Srid pa'i rgyal mo and Dran pa nam mkha'. On the rear left wall near rTa rgo lha btsan is a mural of Gu ru padma 'byung gnas, an excellent example of the impact that the eclectic rim med movement had on Bon. On the left wall of the assembly hall are murals portraying Byams ma rigs lnga, rGyal ba rgya mtsho[54] and two images of Kun tu bzang po, one flesh-colored and one blue. On the right wall are images of yi dam and protectors such as Ge khod, sTag lha me 'bar and dBal gsas gtso mchog. On the north side of the 'Om bu chu, suspended above the defile, is a klu khang, a small white shrine built to honor the water spirits. Directly above the dgon pa are two shrines, a red one called Brag btsan khang, and a white one called the Srid rgyal khang.

The West Side of Dang ra g.yu mtsho

On the northern edge of 'Om bu is a row of four mchod rten—the g.Yung drung bkod legs. North of 'Om bu the mountains recede from the lake shore, forming a broad plain. The mtsho skor trail swings west and a little north from 'Om bu as it skirts the north side of Dang ra. Several kilometers past the 'Om mo chu is another perennial stream issuing out of the mountains which supports Lung gnyi, the smallest of the active agricultural villages of Dang ra. Lung gnyi, located a few kilometers from the lake, has only a few small domiciles. More or less in line with Lung gnyi, on the lake shore, is the north bathing portal. It is marked by a shrine that is part ma ni wall and part la btsas with prayer flags draped over it. West of Lung gnyi is a gap in the mountain ranges which form the east and west sides of the Dang ra g.yu mtsho basin. This conduit between the mountains is called the gSer thang (Golden Plain). On a high point in the gap is the gSer thang la, the site of the local brtan ma goddess. The tallest mountain to the east of gSer thang la is the 6,336-meter-tall mChin dpal gangs lung. The tallest mountain to the west and north of the pass is sTag khra (Striped Tiger), home to a protector of the same name who guards the northern approach to Dang ra g.yu mtsho). Hayden on his map labelled this mountain "Tag te Dom sing" (Hayden).

About 18 kilometers north of gSer thang la is Dang chung mtsho, site of the Dang chung agrarian village and the rNying ma monastery gSang sngags chos gling. Although Dang chung is now 60 meters lower than Dang ra g.yu mtsho, Nain Singh correctly believed that the two were formerly one body of water (Nain Singh: 171). He lumped the village of Dang chung together with 'Om bu, sKyid gsum, Phyug 'tsho and Se zhig by recording that they all contained 20 to 30 homes. However, he did not travel south of

Khyung rdzong.

The mtsho skor trail hugs the lake shore and does not pass through Lung gnyi or the gSer thang la. At the northwest corner of Dang ra, the Phong che chu empties into the lake. West and north are several important pastures, watered by large springs, which are used by the residents of 'Om bu. sKyid lung has a sizeable stream which disappears underground before reaching Dang ra. Two other pastures nestled at the foot of the mountains are Za lung and sTeng po. Reportedly, in summer, 43 tents are erected in these three pastures. Beyond the Phong che chu, the sacred circuit around Dang ra g.yu mtsho turns south along the western shore. Ensconced in the mountains to the west are the 'brog pa camps of Khan chung and Khan chen, and south of them is the Zhing lung gzhi ma. The stream at Zhing lung forms the border between the 'Om bu and La stod townships. Zhing lung is the last Bon po settlement on the west side of Dang ra. All of the communities of the La stod township are Buddhist. In the pre-Communist period, the Zhing lung chu was the border between the 'Om bu and La stod sub-camps of the La dpon 'om gsum tsho pa.

Several kilometers south of Zhing lung, small cairns on the mtsho skor mark the site of a sacred Bon po cave called gLang gdong phug. This small cave, which is situated above the circumambulatory trail, had prayer flags hung inside. According to the Bon oral history of the region this cave was used by the Zhang zhung lama sTag lha me 'bar.[55] sTag lha me 'bar and his demonic twin brother were born to a king and queen. At the behest of the goddess of compassion, Thugs rje byams ma, he killed his evil twin in order to save sentient beings from destruction (Karmay 1972: xxii). sTag lha me 'bar passed the Bon teachings on to sNang ba'i mdog can, who then passed them on to Mu khri btsan po, then Ha ra ci par, sTag ver li ver and A nu 'phrag thag (Karmay 1972: 58).

Proceeding south from gLang chen phug there is a 'brog pa settlement of three houses called gLang ma, located between the gLang chen and gLang chung streams. A couple of small plots of barley are cultivated here which are possibly vestiges of more extensive agriculture in the past. South of gLang ma is a seasonal camp called Yon khug, and the Mon ting ring pastoral camp. Continuing southwards, and a few kilometers inland from the western edge of Dang ra, we find the small 'brog pa village of Mon rna lung. In this area is Khri tse khrus mtsho, reportedly a circular body of water with its own circumambulatory trail, cairns and shrines. Further south is the gSang rub seasonal camp and another camp called lCag rdo 'od ma. Advancing south along the sparsely populated west side of Dang ra, we reach another seasonal encampment near a black escarpment appropriately named Brag nag (Black Cliff).

On the west side of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, halfway between its north and south sides, the Phu tse gtsang po empties into the lake. The Phu tse gtsang po (also called Phu 'bri gtsang po) is the largest and longest river feeding Dang ra. About 30 kilometers upstream from the mouth of the river is the township headquarters of La stod (also called Dung rtse). Perhaps 20 kilometers further up stream from La stod, at the head of the valley, is the sMan khang dgon pa, a small Karma bka' brgyud institution. A number of permanent

'brog pa settlements are located in the Phu tse gtsang po, which is well endowed with marshy winter pasturage. Roughly 10 kilometers upstream from the mouth of the river, in a rocky constriction in the valley, are reportedly the ruins of two Zhang zhung period forts—one on each side of the river. They are called Ser mdzod shar (the Yellow Treasury East) and Ser mdzod nub (the Yellow Treasury West). Overlooking the mouth of the Phu tse gtsang po, on the north side of the valley, is the gzhi ma of Pul sum. Pul sum, which straddles the mtsho skor, consists of about eight small homes and has its own small village chapel with an altar and large ma ni wheel.

South of Pul sum, the west side of the lake circuit is desolate and potable water becomes scarce. Just a few kilometers south of the Phu tse gtsang po is the Ses go gtsang po, the only perennial stream on the southwest side of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, but frequently this water is too laden with sediments to drink. The trail becomes faint as it enters plains and mud flats, leaving pilgrims to negotiate their own way around this part of the lake. There are two permanent settlements at the foot of the mountain range that delimits the Dang ra g.yu mtsho basin in the southwest, approximately 10 kilometers from the lake. One of them is called 'A chen and reportedly has about one dozen homes and some agricultural land. The other one, Hang dal, is located roughly 10 kilometers south of 'A chen. According to local sources, there is a black rock outcrop at Hang dal with the ruins of an old fort.

South of Hang dal, at the edge of the mountains that envelop the Dang ra g.yu mtsho basin, is a turbid body of water called Ar chung mtsho. On the west side of this earth-colored lake are encampments named Gyam dmar and Gyam chung. There is an area of geothermal activity at Gyam chung consisting of scores of small hot springs considered to have curative properties. Ar chung mtsho is the largest of several muddy ponds on the southwest side of Dang ra which, due to the sparsity of grass in the area, are largely ignored by pastoralists. The desolation of the southwest side of the Dang ra circuit ends as the trail approaches the southern extension of the lake. Bounding this flank of the lake is the northern terminus of the rTa rgo range, a sight which enlivens the journey.

rTa rgo 'phrang and Gangs lung lha rtse

There are reportedly 13 year-round streams that flow from the rTa rgo range into the south side of Dang ra g.yu mtsho. The names of these 13 streams from west to east were given locally as: Pe lub chu rgya rong chu (which has three small branches), 'Byag lung chu, 'Og se chu, 'Og nag, Hor dug chu, gLang nga chu, Nag dong chu, Hrag pa chu, Gyang kyar mo chu, Ma lung chu, Chu lung chu, sTag rol chu and 'Bum nang chu. Although the number 13 figures prominently in Bon tradition, there seems to be no sacred geographical tradition about these 13 streams.

The gLa nga chu crosses a bench high above the lake which supports the seasonal encampment of gLa, the largest on the south side of Dang ra g.yu mtsho. From gLa

there is a trail that traverses a northwest spur of the rTa rgo range via the gLa la. This is the route that the rTa rgo rin po che ri skor follows. South of the gLa la on the ri skor are small twin lakes called Mo mtsho spun gnyis. The ri skor re-emerges on the south side of the rTa rgo range by way of the rBa rong la. There purportedly are not any major holy sites on the west side of the ri skor, only the ruins of a small Buddhist monastery called Ra mo lnga.[56]

An open area is conterminous with the western half of the south side of the lake. However, on the eastern half of the south side of Dang ra, the rTa rgo range meets the lake in a dramatic series of granite bluffs known as rTa rgo 'phrang. The trail over the bluffs is wide and well-marked with cairns. In the middle of the rTa rgo 'phrang, beside the Hrag pa chu, is the shrine of sGo bdag, the gnyan servant of rTa rgo rin po che. The shrine is made up of three large cairns with prayer flags suspended between them. Nearby is a small cave associated with the shrine. The shrine and dwelling place of sGo bdag is the very center of the physical link between rTa rgo rin po che and Dang ra rgyal mo and is accordingly suffused with much geomantic power. On the east side of rTa rgo 'phrang, near the lake shore, is a rocky circular mound, the site of the southern bathing portal (Lho'i khrus sgo).

The camping grounds of sTag rol is only a short distance from the rTa rgo gtsang po and the end of the mtsho skor. A short distance southeast from the rTag rol chu is the 'Bum nang chu, where the La stod township ends. South of this stream one re-enters rTa rgo township. This is also the boundary between the Buddhist 'brog pa of La stod and the Bon po of rTa rgo shang. In the pre-Communist period, the 'Bum nang chu formed the line between the La dpon 'om gsum tsho pa and the Sang phyug ser gsum tsho pa. The territory from the 'Bu nang chu south to the confluence of the rTa rgo, and Nang ma rivers on the west side of the rTa rgo gtsang po and east of the crest of the rTa rgo range composed the Ser zhig sub-camp.

On the south bank of the 'Bum nang chu, a vale opens up which is enclosed by the remains of stone walls. Above and to the west of the vale is a series of benches terminating in the slopes of Gangs lung lha btsan lcog dkar rje, the most northerly of the main nine peaks of the rTa rgo range. Near the banks of the 'Bum nang chu is a ruined stone structure, but the bulk of the local ruins are located on the benches. These ruins are believed to be the remains of a Zhang zhung citadel called Gangs lung lha rtse rdzong. Gangs lung lha rtse is reputed to have once held much regional importance.[57] Among the Bon savants of the Dyad, it is believed to have been even larger than Phyug 'tsho grog po rdzong. On the bench immediately overlooking the vale are the remains of monumental structures built of granite blocks. Walls as tall as two meters, up to 1.75 meters thick, and measuring about 18 meters by 18 meters have survived in the middle of the bench. Around these walls about a 90-meter length of foundations nearly two meters thick and level with the ground are exposed. There is no question that these foundations supported large and powerful edifices.

Above this bench are more foundations level with or below the surface. These granite foundations cover approximately 600 square meters and are up to 1.75 meters thick. In addition to the two terraces with extensive architectural remains, traces of structures are found on adjacent benches. No other archaeological site surveyed at the Dyad can boast of larger or more heavily constructed foundations than Gangs lung lha rtse. Other than the two exceptions, the adeptly constructed walls are either level with the surface or concealed under the ground with the stones dispersed. The almost complete deterioration of the site and its absence from historical references support the oral history that attributes Gangs lung lha rtse to the Zhang zhung era.

Below the fort, the eight syllable mantra has been carved onto two boulders. On the larger of the two boulders, the carving wraps around the rock. To the southeast and southwest of the benches, the vale was farmed at one time. The traces of agriculture are particularly noticeable to the southeast of the benches. Irrigation ditches, berms and stone terraces are all clearly distinguishable. The remains of an irrigation system built of granite can be followed to its source on the Gangs lung chu south of the vale. As water resources from the Gangs lung chu or 'Bum nang chu are still available, alternative factors must have contributed to the abandonment of cultivable lands. The loss of such a significant portion of the region's agricultural holdings, changes in climate and soil fertility notwithstanding, appears to be related to the depopulation of the region. In the oral history of the Dyad, shrinking population is frequently cited as a reason for abandoning much of the former agricultural base.[58]

It is not feasible to classify the forts as merely castles or garrisons. A site like Gangs lung lha rtse, with its sundry ruins and agricultural base, has all the earmarks of an integrated community. An agrarian and sedentary people settled and probably built Gangs lung lha rtse. Consequently, the potential for technological and cultural sophistication was considerable. The deftly built walls and foundations demonstrate great skill and a high level of sophistication.

Local people also offer a supernatural explanation for the demise of Gangs lung lha rtse rdzong and the 'Bum nang vale. They believe that the site is the residence of a klu gdol pa, the lowest and most harmful class of klu. The utter loss of this great center of habitation is explained by the presence of this inauspicious creature. Through its pernicious activity, the fertility of the land was destroyed, the inhabitants sickened and the community ruined.[59]

Se zhig Monastery and Environs

South of Gangs lung lha rtse dzong on the Gangs lung chu is the 'brog pa gzhi ma of Gangs lung, consisting of two or three small homes. Upstream of the settlement, on the flanks of the Gangs lung lha btsan lcog dkar rje mountain, is a cave reportedly used by saints of yore called 'A chen. South of Gangs lung is a sacred site named Pha bong gur dkar (White Tent Boulder), where the mountain god Yul sa dkar po is said to manifest.

Consequently, it is one of the most popular places to make invocations and incense offerings to this mountain divinity. A rten mkhar for the deity exists on the top of the boulder. In the 1950s, sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag presided over a 10-day pooja at Pha bong gur dkar to placate Yul sa dkar po, whom the local people held responsible for a rash of wolf attacks on livestock. Nearby is another gnas chen called Pha bong kha bshag (the Boulder Cleaved in Half).

South of Pha bong gur dkar is the gzhi ma of rGye lhe la chung located on an esplanade abutting the rTa rgo range. This esplanade continues south out of view of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, and spreads out onto an alluvial plain. Approximately 20 kilometers south of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, at the foot of Yul sa dkar po, is the Bon monastery of Se zhig. Se zhig, called Ser zhig by the Buddhists next to g.Yu bun, is the topmost monastery in the region.[60] The monastery commands a high piece of level ground above cliffs which overlook the rTa rgo gtsang po valley. According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, who was based at Se zhig for two and a half years, the monastery might have been founded in the 11th century during a period of intense building for the Bon po. In this case, the establishment of Se zhig was more or less contemporaneous with that of gYas ru dben sa kha, sKyid mkhar ri zhing and gShen tshang, the anchors of the 11th century Bon resurgence in gTsang. However, there is no documentation for such an early founding and, as sLob dpon points out in his *'Bel gtam lung snying*, the monastery may only be around 600 years old (p. 26). Se zhig was one of the renowned 18 Bon zhig series of monasteries, most of which are no longer extant.[61]

During the Dzungar invasions of Tibet, the monastery declined. Eventually, it was turned into a Dzungar garrison. The main temple became a military surveillance center (so lta khang) and the monk's cells became army quarters. Sometime after the Dzungar invasion a lama of the Se zhig lineage, followed by a lama of the Zhang zhung lineage, rebuilt the monastery and re-established its traditions. They were succeeded by lamas of the Zhu tshang and Se zhig lineages, including 'Jed spang lung zhu tshang, who continued to expand the monastery. Thereafter Se zhig experienced a period of vicissitudes, declining again on several occasions. Later on the monastery was headed by Zhu tshang stag la dbang rgyal and then by the white-bearded Zhang zhung mkhan po. Although the lineage of the head lamas varied, the caretaker lamas traditionally belonged to the 'Phrang lugs lineage. The current holder of the caretaker lineage is bLa ma Lha rgyal, a man in his late 50s who has been married since the Cultural Revolution. The present head of the monastery is the Se zhig sprul sku, a man in his 20s named bsTan 'dzin 'gyur med, a scion of the august Se zhig lineage.

The monastery's hierarchy included a master of chant (dbu mdzed), master of discipline (dge bskos) and a treasurer (phyag mdzod). The monastery's traditions derive from the Bon rnying lugs (old traditions of Bon) and are part of the dBang ldan zhu lineage and the regional tradition of Nag tshang 'phrang lugs.[62] An important liturgical tradition adhered to at the monastery was Khro bo'i gdangs dbyangs, a chant to the Khro bo protectors. The most important prayer festival at Se zhig was the Ma tri rin

chen sgron ma'i bum sgrub chen mor, held during the Third Tibetan Month. Preparations for the ceremony lasted five days and the prayer recital 15 days. There was also an empowerment accompanying the festival which lasted an additional two days. There were two days of 'cham dances associated with the festival, one held outside and one inside. The Ma tri rin chen sgron ma'i bum sgrub chen mor was attended by monks from Phyug 'tsho, g.Yu bun and 'Om bu monasteries as well as by other religious practitioners and pilgrims. Anyone willing and able to recite the eight syllable mantra could claim share of the donations and tshogs. Eight lay boy helpers were employed during the prayer festival. During the Twelfth Tibetan Month there was another large prayer festival called Phur ba'i dgu gtor and smaller prayer festivals throughout the year.

The monastery's holiest relic was the A ma sa gsum, a square black stone with the magical lettering A ma sa. Other relics included a khyung's claw the size of a yak's horn with a self-formed letter A, Lord gShen rab's horse's tooth, and a crystal stupa containing the rang byung image of the pacific form of Kun tu bzang po. There was also a small cymbal which according to legend was offered to Se zhig lama by the mountain deity, Ngo dmar lha btsan. Traditionally, devotees would offer dngul tam dkar lnga (a Tibetan silver coin) to have this cymbal beaten once, in the belief that if a person made this offering three times in a year, good luck for the year would ensue. The sacred cymbal was also beaten thrice by the dbu mdzed before monastic chanting began. In the mgon khang there was a mask of A bse said to be very powerful and sacred. The maker of the mask received a vision in which he saw A bse and was told that the mask looked like the deity. During the time of Zhang zhung mkhan po, a chapel for the protective deity was built around this mask.

The Mongol fort at Se zhig, called rDzong skya ring, was reputedly five storeys tall, according to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag. There was once a tunnel connecting the fort to the plain below, the remains of which can still be seen. After the Dzungar invasion, when the monastery was rebuilt, rDzong skya ring was converted into the two-storey-tall bKa' rgyud lha khang. The stone and mud brick bKa' rgyud lha khang was the only monastic structure to survive the Cultural Revolution and is the oldest intact religious building at the Dyad. Its fortifications are still discernible in the thick reinforced walls. Officiates of the Third Tibetan Month 'cham sit in a specially-built covered stand near the entrance of the bKa' rgyud lha khang. The actual bKa' rgyud chapel is situated on the second floor of the poorly maintained building. Until 1996 when the new 'du khang was expected to be completed, it was the main venue for religious readings and ceremonies including the daily morning recital from the *rTa dang tshogs bskang*.

The old mgon khang is located in a cave behind the communal kitchen and has not been refurbished. In the Bon tradition, only those who commit to making a daily sadhana to the wrathful deities are allowed inside the mgon khang; pilgrims can only peer into the cave from its threshold. The old assembly hall, like so much of the monastery, was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. A new one was built in the mid-1990s and

the murals in it were slated for completion in December 1995. Appointment of its altars and furnishings will require more time. The murals in the vestibule of the 'du khang, in addition to rTa rgo dge rgan, Dang ra rgyal mo and Ngo dmar lha btsan, include Gangs ti se, a pacific deity depicted with a white complexion, a flaming spear in his right hand and the sun and moon in his left. He wears a rig lnga on his head crowned by a g.yung drung and is mounted on a snow lion. Other deities in the vestibule are the Bon lokapala (kings of the four directions), sPa bo, a special btsan protector of Se zhig, Tshangs pa and Sog po stag 'khrid.[63]

Inside the 'du khang are murals of tantric deities. Beginning from the front of the hall on the right wall, are Ma rgyud gsang mchog thar thug, Me ri, ten of the Chog ga bcu gnyis and the Bya ra ma gsum. Murals on the left wall include the two remaining Chog ga bcu gnyis in their wrathful forms, gShen rab mi bo che, the bDer bshegs gtso bzhi (chief tathagatas) and sGra lha chen po, a white deity on a white horse. On the rear wall srung ma are depicted, as is customary in both lamaist religions. To the right of the entrance a red and black Srid pa'i rgyal mo were painted, and on the left side of the entrance sPo bo, Mi bdud, A bse and dMag dpon. Around the skylight above the hall are paintings of the five topmost Bon tantric deities, the gSas mkhar mchog lnga: dBal gsas rnam pa, Lha rgod thog pa, gTso mchog, Phur ba and Ge khod.

In the past, there were four groups of monastic residences at Se zhig named after the cardinal directions. At present, only a small fraction of these have been rebuilt. A circumambulatory trail called the gling skor goes around the monastery. There are several mchod rten on the gling skor constructed in a variation of the style popular among the Bon in the region. The main distinguishing feature of the Se zhig stupas is that they are built with bum pa that are so small as to be almost indistinguishable from the spires. One of these mchod rten contains relics of the last caretaker lama of Se zhig, Bos rnam dbang rgyal.

The Zar chung chu flows off the slopes of Yul sa dkar po directly behind the dgon pa. On the south side of the Zar chung, at the base of a hill called Rin chen spung, is the btsan khang of sPa bo, the special protector of Se zhig. On the flanks of Rin chen spung is a small cave called sMan ri sgrub phug, where a sMan ri khan po meditated. The hill on the north side of the Zar chung is called Ri rag ri and at its base is a red tinted boulder, a shrine to the rTa rgo lha btsan called rTa rgo gzhon nu (the Youthful rTa rgo). East of the monastery, not far from the rTa rgo gtsang po, is the 'brog pa village of dKyil rag, comprised of eight homes.

Southwest of Se zhig monastery, concealed on the south side of Yul sa dkar po, is an important sacred cave called rDzu 'phrul phug (Cave of Miracles) located at a place called Nyi ma lung. This cave is most closely associated with rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan. A celebrated story set at the rDzu 'phrul phug relates how Nam mkha' blo ldan first met his most famous disciple. One day the deity Ngo dmar lha btsan tshal thig rje, a servant of Nam mkha' blo ldan, heard of the impending arrival of gShen nyi ma rgyal mtshan (b. 1359) a lama of great ability. Ngo dmar lha btsan became very apprehensive,

sensing that the arrival of this lama spelled his doom, so he rushed to his master requesting him not to receive any visitors that day. At midday, gShen nyi ma rgyal mtshan came to rDzu 'phrul phug in the guise of a trader with a yak and asked for tea; but Nam mkha' blo ldan, heeding his servant's wish, flatly refused him. gShen nyi ma rgyal mtshan then asked Nam mkha' blo ldan if he could make tea outside the cave and was told to do as he pleased. gShen nyi ma rgyal mtshan, a highly accomplished gcod practitioner,[64] prepared tea outdoors along with a rich rtsam pa porridge using a white stone he had found nearby. gShen nyi ma offered some of his repast, which he ate out of a human skull vessel, to Nam mkha' blo ldan, who declined even though it looked delicious. When it was about time to leave, gShen nyi ma rgyal mtshan's ox broke loose, taking the clump of grass he was tied to with him. After catching his yak, gShen nyi ma departed. At this time Ngo dmar lha btsan, in an angry mood, appeared to Nam mkha' blo ldan complaining that his recent visitor had caused him great injury. As it turned out, the clump of grass that the yak had uprooted made the mountain divinity go bald and the white rock that gShen nyi ma rgyal mtshan had used to make his meal was the god's kidney fat. Eventually, Ngo dmar lha btsan was healed and he even came to accept gShen nyi ma rgyal mtshan. Consonant with the bskang ba text by rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan, in this tale the savage mountain deity rTa rgo Ngo dmar lha btsan is a dutiful servant of Bon and Bon masters, posing little or no threat to the religion or practitioners.[65]

Further southwest, on the slopes of Ngo dmar lha btsan, is the Shod tram phug, a cave associated with the rDzogs chen snyan brgyud master dMu shod tram chen ('Bel gtam lung gi snying po: 49,50). The cave is located on a plateau and is surrounded by four boulders in the cardinal directions (Nag chu sa khul: 592). Nearby is sDig sgrib dwangs pa'i khrus chu, a pond of limpid water used to purify sins and defilements (Nag chu sa khul: 592). Shod tram phug pa is commonly called Sho tram phug (Cave of the Dice of Mystic Figures) and thought to be the die used by rTa rgo rin po che. The name of the cave is also popularly said to derive from a self-formed secret script written and understood only by the dakinis. Reportedly, there is a stone pillar (rdo ring) in Shod tram phug where dakinis convene.

According to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, dMu shod tram chen lived between the fall of Zhang zhung and the resurgence of Bon at the beginning of the 11th century. Like other great rDzogs chen masters, he is believed to have dissolved into a rainbow body at the time of his death. There is one tale relating to the rDzogs chen master which is believed to have taken place in the area.[66]

Shod tram phug and rDzu 'phrul phug are likely the two unnamed caves mentioned in an article in conjunction with the initiation of the dpa' bo of southern Tibet (Berglie 1980: 39,40). According to native informants, such as the spirit-medium Sri thar sgrol ma, Shod tram phug was also used in the initiation of local dpa' bo. Berglie's informants reported that dpa' bo make pilgrimage to two sacred caves at rTa rgo for initiation. In the larger of the two caves, which corresponds with Shod tram phug, inscriptions called

gter yig (treasure writing) were found which apparently are the same as the rang byung writing of the dakinis.

The dpa' bo of Berglie's article described the cave as containing three stones: one to sit on, one for burning incense on, and one for the medium's me long. A dpa' bo of inferior ability died in the process of initiation, and one of middling ability did not accrue any benefit. However, a superior dpa' bo would find treasures like bells, drums and mtshal (vermilion). The presence of treasures explains why the dpa'bo of southern Tibet reportedly call rTa rgo by the name gTer sgo (Treasure Door). Also at Shod tram phug, dpa' bo would see a magical ladder upon which to ascend. A superior medium flew up on the Thang dkar bird,[67] a middling medium climbed the ladders in the ordinary way, while the inferior medium was weighed down by his drum and head-dress and was unable to ascend. This use of the two most sacred caves by the spirit-mediums gives us our best insight into the function of the caves long before the Bon arrived.

The right eye of Dang ra, Nag mer mtsho, is located above Shod tram phug. This sacred lake was apparently used by adepts to receive visions, but this mystic tradition is now very much attenuated. The lake is supposed to be surrounded by a 100,000 stones and pilgrimage here is considered to be most auspicious in the Year of the Tiger (Nag chu sa khul: 593). The benefits of pilgrimage to Nag mer mtsho are legendary. Both Buddhists and Bon po come to circumambulate the lake (Nag chu sa khul: 593).

From the flanks of Ngo dmar lha btsan, one can take a variety of routes up the rTa rgo gtsang po valley. About a 10 kilometer walk south of Se zhig dgon pa is the stream and gzhi ma of Tsha chu. This distance brings one to the 'brog pa settlement of Kya rgan, home to nearly 30 people, situated at the foot of rTa rgo dge rgan. In Kya rgan there is one house much larger than the rest which was built 50 or 60 years ago and belonged to relatives of the leader (sgar dpon) of the Sang phyug ser gsum tsho pa. The sgar dpon of Sang phyug ser gsum was related to the rdzong dpon of Nag tshang, who regionally was called Pho pho (Grandfather). Not far from Kya rgan is sKyungs kha, the last Bon po village in Nag tshang district before the boundary with La rgyab.

End Notes:

1. In Bon mythology the chough is an important figure. Bya nag dbang rgyal, the servant of Mi bdud, is a chough, and both Yum sras and Srid pa'i rgyal mo have a chough as a mount.
2. The six tsho pa of pre-Communist Nag tshang were dPon gzhung, rTa khro dkar gsum, Sang phyug ser gsum, La dpon 'om gsum, Gom nag and Gro dpal (La stod 'jam dpal: 260).
3. Some of the archaeological sites found at Dang ra g.yu mtsho and rTa rgo rin po che, such as Sum 'bug, were first described in a paper by the author. See Bellezza 1996.
4. A megalithic site was discovered in the vicinity by George Roerich in 1927 during his traverse of eastern and central Byang thang. This journey was the crowning glory of his Central Asiatic expedition (1925-1928), one of its main objectives being the exploration of the barrows of Inner Asia (Roerich 1967: 19,20). During his journey, his expedition discovered traces of the Central Asian Animal style, previously known from Scytho-Siberean graves, among the 'brog pa, prompting him to believe that there was an ancient link between Tibet and Inner Asia (Roerich 1967: 20). Despite the discovery by the Roerich expedition of a megalithic site in the vicinity 70 years ago, it does not appear to be Sum 'bug. The site Roerich discovered is described by secondary sources as consisting of standing stones surrounded by slabs arranged in a square (Tucci 1973: 52; Tarthang Tulku 1986: 97). Nearby are tombs are flanked by stones in a square configuration aligned from east to west, with a large stone in the east. It may be that this description is defective, or it refers to another megalithic site.
5. The west quadrangle measures about 20 meters on its north side, 19 meters on its east and south sides, and 17.5 meters on its west side. These measurements are provisional, however, because the original alignment of the stones is partially obscured on its west and north sides.
6. For an account of the exploration of gNam ru rDo ring, see Bellezza 1995.
7. The first attempt to systematically catalog megalithic and grave sites in Tibet was made by G. Tucci in *Transhimalaya* from his own field investigations combined with data obtained from other researchers, most notably Francke, Roerich and MacDonald. See Tucci 1973. He observed large stones set in the ground or alone in square or circular formations (p. 50). He reported a group of megaliths set in a circle in Shab dge sdings with each stone two to three meters in diameter and monolithic stelae from gZi sde mkhar, sGar byang, Byi'u (Ma pang g.yu mtsho) and rDo brag rdzong (pp. 50,51). In Rwa sgreng, he found a rough circle of stones sacred to a dakini referred to as a Pha bong. Tucci noted that rDo brag rdzong, a site in Sa dga' discovered by the Roerich expedition consisting of a large monolith of gray stone surrounded by pillars of white quartz, was similar to the site he discovered on the Kanzam la located at the borders of the Lahoul sPi ti district in the Indian Himalaya (pp. 52,55,56). He theorized, rather expansively, that the Kanzam la site was either for ritual use or where the chiefs of a tribe were buried. He drew a distinction between square and circular structures with or without a central rdo ring, hypothesizing that the sites without rdo ring are probably graves (p. 56). Tucci observed that there was reference in the Tun-huang manuscripts to the common practice of erecting stones when oaths were made or agreements concluded, but he

added that standing stones could also mark the position of graves for funerary rites (p. 57). More than two decades after Tucci's work, another attempt to collect data on megalithic sites was made by A. Chayet in her *Art et Archaeologie du Tibet*, which was seriously hampered by the paucity of archaeological data available on the subject. See Chayet, pp. 56-58. She presents a list of 13 sites spanning Tibet but concentrated in the west and north of the country. Megalithic sites not included above are found in Ding ri, Nag chu, rKong po, bSam yas, the environs of Lhasa, and Yang zhou in the Yar 'brog g.yu mtsho area. Chayet rightfully notes that monoliths are chronologically very diverse and have been dated to all periods of Tibetan history. Chayet comments that Tibetan megaliths may have originated from Central Asian Bronze Age culture.

Megalithic sites are found in Kashmir, northern Pakistan, Beloristan, La dwags and Baluchistan as well as in north, east and central India. Megalithic culture in Kashmir is represented by at least one dozen monuments including menhirs, cists and cairn circles. In Kashmir, megaliths are not associated with skeletal remains and little is known about them. Menhirs found at Burzahom and Gufkral in Kashmir form semi-circles. Cultural sequences indicate that these were erected towards the end of the Neolithic. At Gufkral 10, mostly uprooted stones up to 6.55 meters in length were found. For a background on megaliths in Kashmir, see Shali, pp. 90-95. In the early Bronze Age Afanasyevskaya culture of the Altai circular arrangements of both small stones and large upright slabs associated with graves are known (Gryaznov: 41). Upright slabs of stone in the Altai are also associated with graves of the Andronovo culture (middle of second millennium B.C.E.) and the Karasuk culture (13th to 8th century B.C.E.)(Gryaznov: 89,98).

8. According to Roerich's written account, the gNam ru site was simply called rDo ring, and was a sacrificial place for a local deity. He described it thus:

   "The expedition...was fortunate enough in discovering several megalithic monuments to the south of the Great Lakes. These were the first megalithic monuments discovered north of the Himalayas. In a place called Do-ring, situated some 30 miles to the south of the Great Lake Pang gon tsho-cha, the expedition found important alignments consisting of 18 rows of stone slabs or menhirs, placed in parallel rows and running East and West. At the Western extremity of the alignment, was placed a cromlech or stone circle consisting of two concentric circles of menhirs or stone slabs. Inside the cromlech were situated three menhirs with a crude stone table (lhatho) or altar in front of them. The central menhir was some 2.75 meters in height, had traces of butter libations, and I was told by a local headman that the stone was the abode of a lha or god protecting the route and travelers. The place is named Do-ring, after this menhir. The headman considered the alignments to be natural formations." For a description of Roerich's discovery of the gNam ru rDo ring, see Roerich 1967, pp. 25,26,119,120.

9. In ancestor worship in Kinnaur, stones are erected to honor the dead. These stones called kutang or shaokori are used to build cairns up to two meters tall on ridge tops overlooking villages during the summer festival cycle. During the funerary rites, food offerings are left

for the deceased which are consumed by birds. It is believed that the birds convey the offerings to the dead in the heavens.

10. The Bronze Age Andronovos of the Pamirs and the Tocharians of the Tarim basin cremated their dead (Mallory: 59,61).
11. Conversely, in Tibetan geomancy, upstream of the center of a confluence is associated with the collection or concentration of geomantic energies, a major reason why monasteries are often located in this position.
12. The field is roughly 100 meters wide at its base and 150 meters from its base to its point. Individual stones are up to two meters in height. From the apex of this triangle rTa rgo dge rgan is nearly due south; a small cairn located east of its base and pointing to rTa rgo dge rgan conforms to the same alignment.
13. The highest agricultural villages in Tibet are either at Dang ra g.yu mtsho or in the sMan chu valley, not far from the La lung la in gNya' lam county.
14. The only other agricultural regions in Tibet as remote as Dang ra g.yu mtsho are located in mNga' ris. However, they are in closer proximity to farming regions in adjacent countries than Phyug 'tsho is to the nearest agrarian villages in Ngam ring county. In mNga' ris there are five isolated agrarian enclaves: Ru thog, sGar, rTsa mda', Khyung lung and sPu Hreng. The last of these, sPu Hreng, is closely associated geographically with agricultural areas in the Karnali river valley system of far western Nepal.There are only three agricultural areas on the entire Byang thang: Dang ra g.yu mtsho, Ru thog, and a small area near bSam gtan gangs bzang in Nag chu county.
15. When the explorer Nain Singh arrived at 'Om bu at the north end of the lake on September 28, the harvest had not yet begun (Nain Singh: 171).
16. One old woman claimed that the parents of 'Dre'u dmar were the Divine Dyad but this was contradicted by Tshul khrims rnam rgyal, who countered that while its parentage is obscure, it is related to the 18 progenitor couples sired by Sangs po 'bum khri and Chu lcam rgyal mo. Tshul khrims rnam rgyal adds that the yul lha does not have a physical body but carries out tasks like a corporeal being. Rather than a physical body, it has a yid gzugs (consciousness body). The Bon bskang ba and gsol kha texts tend to downplay the environment-based character of the Dyad and supplant their pre-Bon character with a Bon doctrinal identity. Those that maintain that beings such as 'Dre'u dmar are the offspring of the Dyad may indeed be keeping alive the most ancient traditions associated with the holy mountain and lake. Perhaps in the aboriginal period the local yul lha was a rkyang deity which came to be identified with the mule of Srid pa'i rgyal mo.
17. Historical documents pertaining to Phyug 'tsho dgon pa were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and very little of its history seems to be remembered. *Bod ljongs nag chu sa khul gyi lo rgyus rig gnas chen* (Nag chu sa Khul: 588) states that the monastery was founded in the Earth Bird Year of the 14th rab byung (1849) by a disciple of sNang ston zla ba rgyal mtshan named g.Yo lag sgom chen smon lam bstan pa. He was succeeded by the highly realized master of gchod, Khyung ser ba sgom chen smon bstan, who was succeeded by Khyung

dkar ba bstan pa rgyal mtshan, who possessed the qualities of wisdom, and his assistant, g.Yung drung ye shes. These two men were active in propagating the Bon doctrine. After them, dGe bshes g.Yung drung bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, a monk of g.Yung drung gling who was born in A mdo province became the mkhan po. He constructed a new chapel and other structures, and was an active teacher. He was followed by Khyung dkar ba dge bshes bstan pa lhun grup, whose primary practice was mkha' 'gro gsang gcod. This practice was popular among the abbots of g.Yung drung gling, and the daily prayers and rituals of Phyug 'tsho dgon pa are most similar to those of g.Yung drung gling monastery.

The previous or sixth Phyug 'tsho rin po che was actually g.Yung drung bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, a gcod pa who died several years ago. This indicates that the name of the fourth lama of Phyug 'tsho given in the article above is incorrect; g.Yung drung bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan's reliquary mchod rten is at the Bon po monastery in Dolanji, India. He is reported to have written a short article on his monastery's history, but it was unobtainable.

18. For a description of Bon 'cham dances, see Karmay 1983.
19. Round towers were noted by G. Tucci at Sras mkhar dgu thog and at Pa snam (cf. Tucci 1973: 75,76).
20. Many of the ruins found at Dang ra g.yu mtsho are attributed to the Zhang zhung period. The prevailing belief among the Bon community is that, until the demise of Zhang zhung in the 7th or 8th century, the region was a thriving center of Bon culture and an important part of the Zhang zhung kingdom. This view is held universally by the resident Bon po, be they lay people or clergy, educated or uneducated. The glory and cultural advancement of Zhang zhung is a cherished belief which tends to overshadow all subsequent periods of history.

For the natives of this Dyad site, the zenith of their civilization was at least 12 centuries ago. Those more familiar with their history paint a picture of a civilization with an advanced material base and infrastructure, of mighty forts and lavish monasteries. Scholarship, the arts, architecture, industry, political power and economic wealth are supposed to have reached a crescendo here during the Zhang zhung period. It is believed that large adjoining tracts, even a large portion of the Tibetan plateau, may have been under the domination of the region.

Legends at Dang ra referring to a large population were first made known to the outside world by Nain Singh: "According to local tradition, the Ombo country was once upon a time, thickly populated and covered with villages" (Nain Singh: 171).11 There is a tale that the 'Om bu region supported a host of monasteries, each with 400 to 1,000 inhabitants (Ma 1991: 59). According to the testimony of one prefectural official familiar with the area, there are ruins of many ancient structures and stupas, and many bleached bones in caves and prairies (Ma 1991: 63). This official believed that, in Zhang zhung times, 'Om bu, on the northeast side of Dang ra, was a prosperous place and the site whence Tibet's earliest civilization emerged. sLob dpon bstan 'dzin rnam dag, who was based at Se zhig monastery at the foot of rTa rgo for two and a half years between 1957 and 1960, heard many stories and legends attesting to the greatness of the region in the Zhang zhung period. These oral accounts, combined with evidence gathered from Bon literary records, persuaded this great

scholar to accept the historical veracity of a golden period at this Dyad site. In *'Bel gtam lung snying*, he writes that ruins and old irrigation systems are found all over the Dang ra region (p. 26). Dang ra, according to the *Dran pa'i rtsis byang*, even had its own Zhang zhung language, described as hoarse like the groan of an ox (Dagkar: Ms-C). It is recorded in the *mDzod sgra 'grel* that local gsas mkhar (monasteries/hermitages) flourished in sTod and gTsang (Dagkar: Ms-A), perhaps, inclusive of Dang ra g.yu mtsho.

21. The complex funerary rites purportedly practiced in Zhang zhung, its iron armaments, and ferruginous power symbols like the iron bya ru can, along with its very wide base of power and territory, hint at an Iron Age character.
22. Historical and physical evidence for defunct agricultural lands is not limited to gNyan dmar and Phyug 'tsho grog po, but extends to the entire length of the east shore of Dang ra as well as to several places on the west and south sides of the lake. Unquestionably, agriculture at the Dyad was far more developed in the past. Presently, there are seven or eight agrarian villages at Dang ra including Phyug 'tsho, in contrast to an additional 15 or more disused areas. A larger agricultural base points to a concomitant larger population, larger infrastructure, and more extensive facilities. Instead of seven or eight agricultural villages, there were upwards of 25 villages or satellite communities, each with its own farms. While it is plausible that certain agricultural holdings were abandoned with the demise of Zhang zhung, the present survey indicates that there has been an ongoing abandonment of agricultural lands for many centuries.

    None of the data suggests that agriculture was a recent innovation. It can be inferred that agriculture came to the Dyad as early as the Neolithic (see Appendix Six). First, Neolithic agriculture was practiced in central and eastern Tibet. Second, barley cultivation in Central Asia predates that found in adjacent countries spreading into China, Afghanistan and the subcontinent. Allowing that the Byang thang shared a greater cultural and geographical affinity with Central Asia than other adjoining regions, there is persuasive reason to consider that barley cultivation came to the Byang thang by the Bronze Age. Third, the climatic optimum found on the Byang Thang in the Middle Holocene favored the introduction of agriculture in the region. Finally, the existence of only a single suitable region for agriculture in a wide swath of the Byang thang would have encouraged its exploitation. The only factors that support a later date are the resistance to develop this economic activity in a marginal and isolated environment, and a cultural disinclination among the natives to supplement hunting, gathering and pastoralism with the growing of food grains. Taken as a whole, the evidence weighs in favor of an early date for the introduction of an agrarian way of life at Dang ra and rTa rgo.
23. The presence of agriculture makes the Dyad among the most important places on the Byang thang in terms of culture and population and that in the past the importance of the region hinged upon its ability to produce vital cereals. This has given Dang ra and rTa rgo a measure of self-sufficiency unmatched on the Byang thang.
24. The effect of environmental decline on prehistoric civilization at Dang ra is not easy to qualify. There may well be parallels with adjacent upper gTsang, in the historical period.

There is a considerable body of evidence to suggest that the decline in civilization in upper gTsang, which began no later than the 17th century, correlates with long term environmental decline as well as political vagaries. The testimony of bSod nams bya dur bzang po, a local leader from Bya dur in the gTsang po river valley in Sa dga' county, obtained in a personal interview with the author in 1995, is typical of residents from this area. He alleges that the climate is becoming increasingly arid and water sources scarcer, a situation accelerated in the Communist period by the introduction of commercial timber extraction. An informal survey made in 1995 found several abandoned villages between Bya dur and Lha rtse in the gTsang po river valley and numerous abandoned irrigation works.

25. Three years of summer drought, from 1993 to 1995, have certainly exacerbated the central problem of insufficient water resources. The paucity of water, like the decline in fertility, appears to be a problem that has developed gradually. It is known from paleoclimatological records that an optimal climate on the Byang thang existed after the close of the Glacial age some 11,000 years ago, and the warming of the plateau, which reached its climax 3,000 to 7,000 years ago in the Middle Holocene (see Appendix Seven). The desiccation of the Byang thang and the attendant changes in the biotic and abiotic environment have been the norm since the Late Holocene, beginning around 3,000 years ago. As we can see, optimal conditions for farming existed in a period that corresponds with the Eurasian Neolithic and probably acted as a powerful impetus in the development of agriculture in the region.
26. mGar chung ri is also called Khra'u spang shar. Hayden on his map designates it Jong Ro and gives its elevation as 19,770 feet (Hayden and Cosson). It is said that from the summit of mGar chung ri, nine lakes including Dang ra g.yu mtsho, can be seen. These are supposed to form a sisterhood. The origin of this tradition is difficult to determine as there is no mention of it in the relevant texts. A probable interrelated myth is one asserting that rTa rgo rin po che and Dang ra g.yu mtsho have nine daughters (Ma 1991: 51).
27. In La rgyab larger similarly shaped structures are used for storage.
28. According to the *mNga' ris rgyal rabs*, a Turkic Qarakhanid (Hor nag mo) invasion circa 1037 devastated mNga' ris, and in the early 12th century there was another invasion of mNga' ris by the Qarakhanid (Gar log)(Vitali 1996: 281,291,308,347-351). According to the *Mar lung rnam thar*, there was a devastating invasion of Nga' ris in 1193 by an unidentified Hor tribe (Vitali 1996: 367-371). These foreign incursions give us some idea of the upheavals that struck western Tibet in the 11th and 12th centuries, though it is not clear if the Dang ra g.yu mtsho area was directly affected. Prior to their defeat by Genghiz Khan, the ruling family of Mi nyag, who had founded the Hsi Hsia dynasty of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands, had migrated to Ngam ring (Stein: 34).

The Bon centers of the Tibetan period in gTsang depended on the nomads of the north for patronage (Karmay 1975: 185). Herein lies another historical riddle: the nature of Bon po exchanges between Dang ra g.yu mtsho and gTsang in the 11th to 15th centuries and its effect on development at the Dyad sites. The dMu chu is and was an important conduit between gTsang and the Dyad, and a significant number of people still travel north from gTsang to work in construction, trade, to purchase livestock, and for pilgrimage along this

route. In 1218, Genghiz Khan's general Jebe Noyan conquered Turkestan and Khotan (Vitali 1996: 416). According to the *gNyos lha nang pa rnam shar*, an incursion into sTod circa 1224 was so widely destructive that 'brog pa settlements on both sides of Byang were totally destroyed (Vitali 1996: 428,429). In 1240, the Mongols recognized 'Bri gung pa power in mNga' ris (Vitali 1996: 418-423). The *bsTan rtsis* records that during the reign of the Mongol king Mon gor gyal po (reigned 1249-1259), the head of Tibet rGyal bu Go dan, assigned leaders to the various religious communities and regions of Tibet (Vitali 1996: 418,419). La stod thang chung (sic Dang chung), located immediately north of Dang ra g.yu mtsho, was assigned to the Mongolian prince Mo gha lha.

29. According to the *rGya bod yig tshang*, the Shangs prince Ban rgan blo gros rin chen in 1306 or 1307 travelled to the Yuan court to meet the Mongol king, Ol ja du, and was given a patent confirming his power to rule over Shangs territory stretching as far as Dang ra g.yu mtsho. As a result of this patent, Ban rgan pa was also empowered to collect taxes as a khri dpon. The Shangs princes (sTag sna rdzong pa) were a Sa skya feudatory. Through their feudatory, the Sa skya maintained sovereignty over the Byang khri skor, which included Dang ra g.yu mtsho and Ru thog, until their demise in 1354. The appointment to rule the Byang khri skor went first to the father of Ban rgan pa, Rin chen brtson 'grus, and then devolved to Ban rgan pa's half-brother Dharma dkon mchog because Ban rgan pa, a monk, was not involved in secular affairs. After the downfall of the Sa skya, the Phag mo grup pa extended their control over Shangs until 1406. See Vitali 1996, pp. 569-573.

30. The rDzogs chen adept gShen rgyal lha rtse founded a hermitage on Dang ra called g.Yung drung lha rtse, with the patronage of a sponsor from sKyid gsum (Zhang zhung snyan brgyud). sKyid gsum and its forts could have dominated the region for centuries as the Byang thang remained embroiled in localized conflicts. In the late 17th century, the influence of the village extended to Dang ra g.yu bun monastery, which was under the authority of the sKyid gsum bla brang (Nag chu sa khul: 581).

31. gShen lha 'od dkar, Sangs po 'bum khri and gShen rab mi bo che compose the Bon triad. gShen lha 'od dkar corresponds with the Bon sku (dharmakaya), is associated with light, and is a variant of the deity Amitabha (Kvaerne 1995: 25,26). gShen lha 'od dkar is white color and his hands rest in his lap in the attitude of meditation (Kvaerne 1995: 25,26).

32. The original significance of the name g.yu bun (turquoise mist) is not clear. Mist may have had cosmogonic significance. In Tibetan literature, the color of mist is usually described as either white or turquoise; it also has awe-inspiring and aesthetic connotations. For example, in the sTag lung primary text for gNyan chen thang lha, a turquoise mist is said to flow around the mountain's head (dbu la g.yu bun 'thal)(fol. 16v).

33. Some biographical details of Sad ne ga'u are provided in a description of the monastery (Nag chu sa khul: 580,581). He was born at Dang ra Senge rdzong brag phug gnam skas can in the Year of the Water Pig to Zhang zhung rgyal mtshan bde ba (his father) and rGyal bza' klong yang. He studied under many learned Zhang zhung masters including Pe ne gu and the dPon gsas chen po (Great Master), A nu 'phrag thag. He excelled in his studies and gained realization. He was very successful with his meditation, attaining enlightenment

and eventually a rainbow body. His realization was reflected in the performance of unimaginable feats, such as healing a leper with a mere glance, taming wild animals, subduing evil forces, emanating fire from his body, flying in the sky on a drum, and walking on the surface of Dang ra. Sad ne ga'u also built a crystal stupa under the water of Dang ra g.yu mtsho. This last feat, according to sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, was among his most famous and is related to the Bon domination of the lake.

In Professor Karmay's translation of the *Treasury of Good Sayings*, additional biographical data on Sad ne ga'u is found. A nu 'phrag thag of Zhang zhung passed the teachings onto Sad ne ga'u. Sad ne ga'u practiced at Dang ra g.yu bun with his partner kLu lcam 'bar ma. He performed many miracles, including curing leprosy and repulsing armies and floods. He attained enlightenment by making his body as clear as the sky. An army of 16,000 from the Zhang zhung regions of Se lde, Tal, Ta mi, Shud, Kye mang and Gu ge engaged him in battle, but he made them collapse through the power of meditation. Other miracles attributed to Sad ne ga'u include transforming his hat into an eagle which pursued the enemies of Bon, dousing a burning house with his spittle, and turning his shoe into a donkey. Sad ne ga'u lived for 277 years and then disappeared into the sky on a turquoise dragon. Sad ne ga'u was a disciple of Ra sangs bsod rtse and meditated in a cave for 16 years, where his bodily elements disappeared. Ma rgyud was transmitted to Sad ne ga'u, at his request, by A nu 'phrag thag, and Sad ne ga'u was included in the transmission lineage of Ge khod. Sad ne ga'u transmitted the Bon teachings to Thad mi thod ke who practiced them with his consort sMan gcig g.yu lo ma at Khyung rdzong. See Karmay 1972, pp. 47,50,51,54.

One can only wonder if Phyug 'tsho grog po and its lion formation are related to Senge rdzong brag phug gnam skas can, the birthplace of Sad ne ga'u. The donkey, as mentioned in the biographical account of the saint, is reared in Dang ra, which is unusual on the Byang thang. The legend of Sad ne ga'u disappearing into the sky on a turquoise dragon is immortalized in the g.Yu 'brug la (Turquoise Dragon Pass), located on the crest of the high range to the east of the monastery. The g.Yu brug la is flanked by Pho ba ri (Consciousness Transference Mountain), the highest mountain in the vicinity. According to regional oral history, the sacred sGrub khang cave was one of the prime meditation places for Sad ne ga'u.

34. One young monk claimed to have two rus rgyud lha, including rTa rgo dge rgan, which was subsidiary to his main one. It appears as though he was confusing his pho lha and mes lha (ancestral deity), a common occurrence as these categories of divinities have become ambiguous. In the general region, rTa rgo rin po che is represented as a pho lha but reportedly gNyan chen thang lha is not.
35. The most famous king of the dynasty of Lig mig rgya was the last in the line, and whose assassination ended Zhang zhung. There were, however, kings preceding him who lived in the region. *Ti se'i dkar chag* provides a list of the 18 kings of Zhang zhung (Norbu, Prats: 127,128), as does the *mTsho ma pham lo rgyus* (Annals of Lake Manasarover)(Norbu 1989: 21,22). The 13th in the list is King Shel rgyung, the holder of the sparkling light bya ru can, and the 14th in the list is King Lig mur nam mkha', the holder of the lapis lazuli light bya ru can. Both of the kings resided in rTa rgo country. *bKa' stod* and the biography of sPa nyi ma

'bum gsal allude to a line of 40 Zhang zhung kings (Dagkar: Ms-C).

36. This theory was shared by sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag in an interview with the author in 1994. According to the *'Bel gtam lung snying*, one of the four forts on the cardinal directions of Zhang zhung was Khyung rdzong (p. 36). These four forts, called the sTag seng khyung 'brug, contained palaces of the Zhang zhung kings (Nag chu sa khul: 583). As one of these four legendary strongholds, the importance of Khyung rdzong to Bon history is immense.

37. Sad mar kar, through a minister named Mang chung, sent verses conveying her distress and a packet consisting of 30 pieces of turquoise to her brother King Srong btsan sgam po, emboldening him to attack Lig mig rgya (Norbu 1995: 32).

38. In *rDzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan brgyud kyi bon ma nub pa'i gtan tshigs* there is an account in the de'u tradition of the ambush masterminded by a minister of King Khri srong lde btsan (Norbu 1995: 32,33,234). In this text, the minister (phrin blon) is called sNang nam legs grub and is portrayed as a wicked, cunning man. The minister worked on creating envy in the third wife of King Lig mig rgya, Sa snang sgron legs ma, so that she would betray her husband. Succumbing to the minister's provocation, Sa nang sgron legs ma advised him to wait in ambush for the king in the following month when he would be travelling to Sum pa with only a light escort. The corrupted queen agreed to act as the messenger and to leave secret signs on a la btsas on top of a pass. King Khri srong lde btsan and his minister, together with an army of several thousand, were lying in wait at the appointed time. The Tibetan king recovered the message: a pan full of water containing small pieces of gold and conch and a poisoned arrow tip. King Khri srong lde btsan deciphered that the full pan of water meant that King Lig mig rgya would arrive on the full moon; the piece of gold and silver meant that his troops should be garrisoned at gSer phug (Gold Cave) and Dung phug (Conch Cave) at Dang ra; and the poisoned arrow was a signal that they were to dispatch the Zhang zhung king. Making all the necessary preparations, the king of Tibet was able to kill the king of Zhang zhung.

    According to local informants, Dung phug is located over the mountains east of g.Yu bun dgon pa. In the map included in Zhu nyi ma grags pa's Zhang zhung dictionary, the cave is situated northwest of Dang ra g.yu mtsho. The pass alluded to in the tale of the demise of King Lig mig rgya is probably the g.Yu 'brug la. The location of gSer phug is less clear. Inferences permitted, Khyung dzong was both a religious and political base of power.

39. The Bon gter ma tradition is divided into five categories: southern, northern, central, Khams and recent. In this system of classification, rMa ston srol 'dzin belongs to the recent textual treasures group. See Karmay 1972, pp. 190,191. The literature of the southern tradition is believed to have originated in Zhang zhung and spread to central Tibet. The literature of the central tradition was supposedly also written in the language of Bru sha. See Dagkar: Ms-A.

40. In the *Treasury of Good Sayings* we learn that rMa ston srol 'dzin was an emanation of Sad ne ga'u, the founder of g.Yu bun dgon pa. In this same history is a narrative of how the discovery of scriptural treasures was made. rMa ston srol 'dzin met an ascetic dressed in a turquoise robe and feathered hat lying in a cave. The ascetic was not well and he had rMa ston srol 'dzin bleed him, but milk came out of a vein in his arm instead of blood. Realizing that he

was a holy person, rMa ston srol 'dzin bowed down and asked him his name. The ascetic replied that, in Zhang zhung, he is called Gyer mi nyi 'od. The ascetic gave rMa ston srol 'dzin a text entitled *rTsa rgyud gsang ba bsen thub* and explained where he could find its companion. rMa ston srol 'dzin began to search for texts and, in the Year of the Earth Mouse, he opened the textual treasury at Dang ra khyung rdzong. A small box of texts were found there which Gyer mi nyi 'od had entrusted to the mtsho sman (Dang ra rgyal mo) and the lha btsan (rTa rgo). See Karmay 1972, pp. 160,167,168. Dang ra khyung rdzong gter ma discovered by Gyer mi nyi 'od and rMa ston srol 'dzin consist of tantras, a liturgical text of cremation rites, a rDzogs chen treatise and a sadhana of tranquil deities of the Zhi khro cycle. See Karmay 1977, no. 11-3, no. 13-14, no. 14-4, no. 29-8, no. 29-9, no. 29-22, no. 29-28, no. 41-9, no. 73-2.

41. This pass was one of two called "Ne-thung la and La u la" on the route of Hayden and his companion Cosson when, on June 8th, 1922, they saw Dang ra for the first time (Hayden: 142). A photograph published by Hayden looks out north from the proximity of Ga ra la (Hayden: 145).
42. This mantra is part of the tshe sgrub snying po recitations and is dedicated to the long life deity Tshe dbang rig 'dzin, a deified lama who was the disciple of the first Dran pa nam mkha'. It is believed that the first Dran pa na mkha' lived in the Zhang zhung period centuries before the Dran pa nam mkha', who was a contemporary of Gu ru rin po che.
43. This mantra is found in the *Du tri su* text attributed to gShen rab mi bo che, which contains prayers and dedications. It is directed to Kun tu bzang po, and its function is to purify sin and to help liberate sentient beings from the lower realms.
44. This oral account was obtained in personal communication with sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag in September 1995.
45. This biographical account of gShen rgyal lha rtse is found in the Delhi edition of *rDzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan brgyud kyi rgyud pa'i bla ma'i rnam thar*, pp. 40-44.
46. This biographical account of Lha sgom dkar po is found in *rDzogs pa chen po zhang zhung snyan brgyud kyi rgyud pa'i bla ma'i rnam thar* (same text and edition as above), pp. 44-48.
47. In the *gZi brjid*, rGyu'i bon (Bon of Cause) refers to the first four of the nine ways (theg pa rim dgu), the part of Bon which is based on Shes pa can bcu gnyis rites. See Snellgrove 1967 for his translation of the *gZi brjid*. rGyu'i bon are considered lesser teachings than the Buddhist inspired 'Bras bu'i bon (Bon of Fruit), the last five of the nine ways, a situation that must have developed as a reaction to the overwhelming success of the Buddhist religion in Tibet. Cf. Norbu 1995, pp. xvii,xviii.
48. The upper two figures engraved on the g.Yung drung lha rtse boulder are remarkably similar to the upper row of figures in sequence one and three, and the two figures in sequence two of the bKra shis do chen specimens. Moreover, the third figure from the top is not unlike the third figure from the left in the second row of sequence one at bKra shis do chen. The lowermost of the four figures at g.Yung drung lha rtse is apparently quite unlike anything found at bKra shis do.
49. In a Bon gsol mchod text, he is called Brag btsan dmar po and is described as grasping a

jewel and riding a lion when manifesting as the lha of wealth, as holding a vase and riding a blue horse when manifesting as the lord of life, and as taking on the guise of the brna bird and riding a vixen when he manifests as the lord of drought (Gibson: 191). The abode of Brag btsan is an approximately 6200-meter-tall mountain northeast of 'Om bu of the same name. Brag btsan also seems to refer to a generic class of btsan residing in rocks and cliffs at various places on the Byang thang and other places in Tibet.

50. In *rNam bshad gsal sgron* there is a reference to a fort called mKhar 'om bu sgo bzhi equated with Khyung lung dngul mkhar (Dagkar: Ms-C). It must be questioned, however, whether this fort might not have actually been located at 'Om bu.
51. The origin of the name of the village is debatable. Despite the identical spelling of the village and the Tibetan tamarisk, none of those interviewed subscribed to the belief that the village was named after a tree. Furthermore, tamarisk does not even grow at 'Om bu. Some people even maintained that tamarisk should be spelled 'um bu to differentiate it from the village. One opinion is that 'Om bu is actually the conjunct form of 'o ma lbu ba (Milk Bubble). An explanation proffered for this name is that boiling milk gives the illusion of bubbles appearing and disappearing on the surface, symbolizing the cycle of growth and decay and the transience of prosperity (Ma 1991: 59). This explanation, which carefully conforms to the Bon doctrine of impermanence, is probably not the original import of 'Om bu. First, the orthography of milk bubble in its conjunct form is 'o lbu and not 'om bu. Although in the dialect of Nag tshang 'o lbu and 'om bu are pronounced in a similar fashion, this does not account for the orthographic discrepancy. There are Bon po, including sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, and people of the region who maintain that 'Om bu is not related to 'o lbu, but who are unable to provide an alternative etymology. Perhaps there is no etymology for 'Om bu and it is merely a toponymn. There is some speculation, however, that 'Om bu and 'Om mo are the names of prehistoric deities. Nain Singh called 'Om bu "Ombo".
52. Generally, sPo btsas are built of heaps of stone or clay with branches of juniper mounted in them and rlung rta or colored threads affixed to the branches. They are often found on the four corners of the roof of a home and are dedicated to the yul lha, pho lha or dgra lha. The family gsas mkhar is identical to the larger central spo se. See Tucci 1966, p. 187. According to sLob dpon 'Phrin las nyi ma, in his native village of Tshwa dga' in Dol po the Bon po fix the horns of deer, Blue Sheep, 'brong and lha'i g.yag on their spo tsas (locally called lha gtsug) for the pho lha, dgra lha, rus rgyud lha and yi dam (personal tutelary deity). The horn of the blue sheep is especially prized for this purpose. These horns function as supports for the deities (lha'i rten). For example, on sLob dpon's roof the horns are dedicated to his yi dam/rus rgyud lha, dBal gsas rnam pa. According to Bya dur bsod nams bzang po, who is from what was the largest land-owning family in the Bon po village of Bya dur in Sa dga' county, less virtuous/lower status/commoner families had two or four lha gtsug on the roofs of their homes dedicated to the yul lha, dgra lha, rus rgyud lha and pho lha. These were often simply built and had horns and prayer flags attached to them. On the other hand, Bya dur bsod nams bzang po's family had four well-built lha gtsug, one on each corner of the roof, with horns and prayer flags. There was no central shrine because the

middle of the roof opened into a central courtyard. These large well-built lha gtsug, unlike those of lesser families contained bum pa and a srog shing. Each of the lha gtsug was painted a different color representing their rus rgyud lha: Mi bdud—dark blue, Sri pa'i rgyal mo—sky blue, A bse—red, Nyi pang sad—white. Another major difference between Bya dur bsod nams bzang po's family and those of lesser status is that its lha gtsug were exclusively for its own rus rgyud lha. The worship of the pho lha, other dgra lha and the yul lha was carried out at the gsas mkhar of the local yul lha, Bum pa spun gsum, illustrating the special relationship the family had with it. For instance, on the third day of Lo gsar, Bya dur bsod nams bzang po's father would depute men to recite invocations, make incense offerings and erect new prayer flags at the gsas mkhar of the yul lha. In Tibet, yak horns were put on the roof tops by village headmen to display their valor (Dagkar: Ms-C).

53. The g.Yung drung bsam gtan gling monastery was founded in the Iron Tiger Year in the 15th rab byung (ca. 1890) by Lama bSod nams g.yung drung of the Dang ra gu ru gdung rgyud lineage (Nag chu sa khul: 586). He was succeeded by g.Yung drung phun tshogs (Nag chu sa khul: 586). This biological lineage continued through bZod pa rgyal mtshan to the current holder, Gu ru 'od zer, who is around 60 years of age and is the fourth lineage holder. Gu ru 'od zer has no male issue and it is unclear who will succeed him. The position of Mi 'gro ba 'dren has been held by Gu ru 'od zer and his clan for many centuries. One of its most famous holders was Gu ru yon tan senge, who lived in the 13th to 14th centuries and whose short biography is found in *rDzogs chen yang rtse klong chen*. The holders of the Mi 'gro ba 'dren lineage are renowned for their ability to cure physical and mental illness, and to help people with practical problems. They are also reputed to be versed in liberating the consciousness of the deceased (pho ba).
54. The popular Bon deity rGyal ba rgya mtsho is very similar to the thousand-armed sPyan ras gzig, gDugs dkar.
55. According to sMan ri mkhan po, the most important site of the Zhang zhung lama, sTag lha me 'bar, is at dBal rong (also called sTag rong) about 30 kilometers north of Bar yangs in 'Brong pa county. There are hot springs and 18 naturally-occurring mounds called Dregs pa bco brgyad found here.
56. The explorer Sven Hedin was aware of the circuambulatory trail around rTa rgo (Hedin 1909 vol. II: 30).
57. A *Dang ra'i dkar chag*, a register of sacred sites at the Dyad, does indeed exist in manuscript form in the region. The author briefly inspected one hand-written by a lama from sTeng chen several years ago. The document is about 30 small pages long and mentions many of the major gnas chen.
58. Gangs lung lha rtse, which must have supported a relatively large population at one time, is ironically now the home of a summer camp inhabited by a single family. An old woman who had spent many years in the vicinity heard that a long time ago, before the time of her parents and grandparents, Gangs lung lha rtse was farmed. The clarity of the agriculturally modified topography suggests that land remained arable at Gangs lung lha rtse until relatively recently.

59. In the region, it is commonly believed that there are five major types of klu (color typology aside) and each person is born with one type which remains with him or her for the duration of his or her life. Each of the five types of klu attracts a different kind of luck potential to the person to whom it is attached. In descending order of desirability, the five types of klu and the fate they bring are: 1) klu rgyal rigs—the fate of kings, 2) rje rigs—the fate of very prosperous and successful people, and of leaders 3) dmang rigs—the fate of ordinary people, 4) bram rigs—the fate of the poor, and 5) klu gdol pa/klu dor pa/klu bdud—the fate of the sick and miserable. In a creation myth for the five hierarchical klu (Tucci 1949: 711), the void gives rise to a series of cosmogonic phases, including the g.yung drung and rdo rje rgya gram, to finally see five eggs appear from the elements. These eggs produce the four castes of humans (mi rigs) and animals which in hierarchical order, are made of gold, turquoise, iron, bronze and copper.

    The text *kLu 'bum dkar nag khra gsum* was rediscovered by gShen chen klu dga'. It recounts the adventures of gShen rab mi bo che with the klu and expounds the rituals designed to subdue them. The text also classifies the klu into a number of categories, some of which function like a caste system.

60. Sven Hedin, who did not visit Se zhig, had this to say about it (Hedin 1909 vol. II: 29,30): "Sershik-gompa, of which we had frequently heard, and which Nain Singh names Sasik Gombas on his map, stands on an even slope at the eastern foot of the mountain. The monastery is under the Devashung, and has twenty Pembo brethren and an abbot named Tibha. Some of the monks are said to be well off, but on the whole the convent is not rich; it is supported by nomads in Naktsang, Largep, and Sershik. The monastery is constructed chiefly of stone, but it also contains timber transported hither from the Shangs valley. There is a *dukang* and a number of small images of gods." Reportedly, the governor (rdzong dpon) of Nag tshang, Lha rje tshe ring, told Hedin that Se zhig monastery was "great" and a place where "influential, intriguing monks dwell" (Hedin 1909 vol. I: 249-251).

61. The early history of Se zhig has been effectively lost. According to the *'Bel gtam lung gi snying po*, it may have been founded on the site of a Zhang zhung fort (p. 26). Se zhig was founded in the seventh rab byung in the Tibetan Year of the Wood Bird (the beginning of the 15th century), by Se zhig lama. This founding occurred around the same time as the main Bon monastery of central Tibet, sMan ri gling. In its early years it was one of the largest Bon monasteries in the Nag tshang Dang ra region. A document known as *Nag tshang sger tsho bdun* reveals that the Fifth Dalai Lama recognized Se zhig as an official state monastery in the region and it was awarded government certification of its status. The monastery's official name is Se zhig khor da'e. It consisted of a two-storey shrine with reliquary stupas and residences for the Se zhig bla ma and the other monks and had a good stock of religious texts. One of its most outstanding images was a 'Jigs byed statue enshrined in the 'Dzi bon dbang gi rgyal mtshan chapel near the hill of Nyi lung south of the monastery. An account of the history of the monastery, its ceremonial structure and relics is found in a chapter of the *Nag chu sa khul gyi lo rgyus rig gnas chen* by sKal bzang sri chod (Nag chu sa khul: 589-593).

62. After two centuries of obscurity, the resurgence of Bon began with gShen chen klu dga', who entrusted three of his disciples, each from a different clan, with the preservation of three different Bon traditions. Bru chen na mkha' was entrusted with cosmology and metaphysics, Zhu yas legs po with rDzogs chen and sPa ston dpal mchog with tantra. Cf. Tenzin Namdak Rinpoche, pp. 145,146. Traditionally, the most popular Bon tradition at the Dyad has always been rDzogs chen.
63. Sog po stag 'khrid is an extremely popular theme in Buddhist wall murals and is found in the vestibule of many a monastery. It depicts a Mongolian prince leading a tiger with a golden chain. The nobleman, tiger and chain symbolize the rigs gsum mgon po (wisdom, compassion and skilful means), the three qualities whose perfection bring about enlightenment. The recent painting of the Sog po stag 'khrid at Se zhig illustrates the kind of assimilation still taking place between Bon and Buddhism.
64. The object of the Bon gcod practice, like its Buddhist counterpart, is to sacrifice one's body for the satisfaction of obstructive forces and disturbances. This advanced and secret tantric practice is seen as a powerful tool for the development of wisdom. It usually entails three or more years of retreat. The main Bon gcod practice is the mkha' 'gro gsang gcod, which entails pilgrimage to 100 mountains, 100 lakes and rivers, and to various cemeteries. Destructive gcod activities are common. For example, yul lha are provoked by the practitioner by upsetting their cairns, emptying the contents of their shrines and tearing down their prayer flags. The practitioner challenges the yul lha in order to assess its character and strength. If the gcod pa is victorious, he gains power over the yul lha, who sometimes then becomes his personal servant.
65. In another tale rTogs ldan nam mkha' blo ldan invited his disciple gShen nyi ma rgyal mtshan to visit him at rDzu 'phrul phug. He sent his servant to procure food supplies for the upcoming visit. The servant, after obtaining a full sack of food, slung the sack over his shoulder and started back for the cave. The sack became increasingly heavy until it was unbearable to carry and the servant was forced to discard some of its contents. Again the sack grew in weight and the servant was compelled to throw away more food. This chain of events was repeated until there was only one plate of food left and even that took a struggle to bring back to rDzu 'phrul phug. When the sack was emptied by Nam mkha' blo ldan it was discovered that the plate of food had miraculously turned into a plate of gold. This gold was used to cast a statue of gShen rab mi bo che, which was then installed in gShen tshang dgon pa in gTsang. These tales, associated with rDzu 'phrul phug, were related by sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag.
66. dMu shod tram chen's relative dMu rgyal ba blo gros, was a shepherd who had little interest in practicing religion. One day, when he was 42 years old, he witnessed wolves attacking his flock of sheep. One of the sheep was disemboweled, and died very slowly. The pain-stricken animal made dMu rgyal ba blo gros think of his own pain and suffering. He then realized that the only way to avoid more of the same was through spiritual practice. From that time on, dMu rgyal ba blo gros became a practitioner and eventually a highly adept

one. He practiced and taught as far as Bhutan. This account was shared by sLob dpon bsTan 'dzin rnam dag.

67. The thang dkar is a Bon mythical white bird that is the mount or part of the retinue of various deities.

Appendix One

Paintings and engraved petroglyphs have been discovered the world over, the ones found in 'High Asia' being of special concern to the current study. A comparison of cave paintings and engravings from adjacent countries and regions is useful for placing gNam mtsho in a wider cultural and geographical context. The paintings of gNam mtsho represent a distinctive and culturally separate branch of Eurasian steppe art. This branch constitutes an indigenous Byang thang genre of painting.

Approximately 25 sites have been discovered in Xinjiang, 12 in Qinghai, 12 in Inner Mongolia, and three in Gansu province. Sites of rock art from these provinces and Tibet show an affinity with sites in southern Siberia, Mongolia and eastern Central Asia. This so-called Steppe or Eurasian Animal style is dominated by hunting and herding motifs. Compositions are often characterized by strength, vigor, coarseness and naturalism. This style contrasts strongly with petroglyphs found in south China which are soft, smooth, elegant and delicate in style and belong to the "witch culture". For a general survey of rock art in China, see Jiang. For a historical perspective of steppe cultures in Central Asia, see *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*.

The rock art of Tibet is most closely related to that of Mongolia, but there are many significant differences. For example, at the Ulanqab site as well as other sites in Inner Mongolia, petroglyphs consisting of round and teardrop faces are found. This motif, along with petroglyphs of the hoof-prints of horses and deer, apparently is not represented in the rock art of Tibet. In the Guangyi township, one painting done in a red pigment has survived which depicts an ancient agrarian scene. Others have been destroyed. At the Baicha site, 95 percent of the motifs depict deer, which indicates a deer fetish or cult. At Xingdi in central Xinjiang, a distinctive design resembling a human hand is found, another motif contrasting with the Byang thang petroglyphic record. At Xingdi, an early more refined phase attributed to the Scythians contrasts with a latter phase attributed to the Mongolians or Xiongu. Another key difference between the petroglyphs of Mongolia, Xinjiang and Qinghai, as well as other regions of Central Asia and that of the Byang thang, is that in the former the Bactrian camel is an important figure while on the Byang thang it is not.

Another contrast between the petrogylphs of Tibet and other regions of inner Asia is the dominance of the yak. These differences reflect the natural distribution of the camel and yak. For a synopsis of rock art in Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang, see Jiang, pp. 73-92, 113-122. In Mongolia, Siberia, Altai, and in West and East Turkestan the chariot is a common motif (Francfort 1992: 98-100). However, it is not found in the rock art of gNam mtsho. This suggests that much of the Byang thang was insulated from the large scale movements of the Saka and Scythians.

During the Soviet period, one of the foremost experts on Mongolian petrogylphs

was A. P. Okladnikov. Okladnikov based his work on the survey of tens of sites located throughout Mongolia. The general impression of Mongolian petroglyphs is that, like their Tibetan Byang thang counterparts, they were engraved in a bold, vibrant, forceful style with animals, especially ungulates, dominating most of the compositions. Deer, wild sheep and wild goats are the most frequently portrayed animals. The horns of the goats and sheep often have their length exaggerated as on the Byang thang. Mounted horses and cattle are less common than on the Byang thang. Hunting is a popular theme and like the Byang thang, the weapon of choice is the bow and arrow. Less common are spears or pikes. Birds, including raptors whose appearance is similar to the style of raptors and khyung in Tibetan rock art, are found. As in Tibet, male figures are depicted with their genitals exposed. Circles, crescents and cruciform figures are depicted separately but no swastikas are found. At the very extensive Chuluyn-Gola site animals with hyperbolic elongated bodies are fairly common. See Okladnikov 1981a; Okladnikov 1981b.

There are also stylistic and compositional affinities between the petroglyphs of the ancient hunting cultures of Siberia and the Byang thang. For a survey of cave art at Lake Baikal from the Neolithic to the appearance of the Turkic tribes, see Okladnikov 1974. A recent study of petrogylphs in southern Siberia (Oglakhty) traces the stylistic development of rock carvings from the Upper Paleolithic through the Bronze Age and Scytho-Siberian period to the recent period; see Sher et al. A companion study of petroglyphs at nearby sites in southern Siberia (Tepsej and Ust'-Tuba)(located roughly 24 degrees north of gNam mtsho) also chronologically delineates cultural sequences beginning with the Upper Paleolithic. This was accomplished through the analysis of the style of art, characteristics of the patina, comparisons with engraved mortuary stelae and other artifacts, archaeological sequencing of sites, cross-cultural rock art comparisons, geomorphological and biochemical changes, and method of manufacture. Despite this being a state-of-the-art attempt at dating petroglyphs significant questions and inconsistencies remain and much of it is theoretical. As with other inner Asian sites, zoomorphic figures abound and represent between 54 to 71 percent of the total. Wild and domestic cattle were the most common animal motifs followed by moose, horses and deer. Of the identifiable anthropomorphic figures (less than half of the total), archers and horseman were the most common, while warriors and shamans were also represented. See Francfort et al 1995.

In 1982, petroglyphs were discovered in Qinghai province in the valley of Halonggou and at Bahamaoligou near the previously discovered ones at Nuomuhung. At Halonggou, one of the two sites depicts bovidae and deer drawn in a more rudimentary manner than classic steppe art, in which deer, leopards and bulls are depicted with greater refinement. At the second site, a precisely drawn camel and bull were found. At Bahamaoligou nine sequences of petroglyphs were discovered which exhibit a great variety of themes. The high proportion of goats, sheep, dogs, horses and burros indicate a nomad society. Other animals depicted include camels, snakes and even an elephant

with an upright trunk. The society that created this art was similar to the one that created the petroglyphs of Nuomuhung and may be the ancestors of the present day 'brog pa of A mdo. Numerous abstract motifs found in the proximity of the animals include solar symbols, circles, truncated pyramids and vermicular shapes. Buddhist endless knots and curvilinear designs were added much later to the rock surface. An examination of the typology of the petroglyphs reveals that they share links with those discovered in the provinces of Gansu, Ningxia and Inner Mongolia. However, in Qinghai, human figures were apparently not depicted nor were the mascoid motifs which are found throughout Eurasia, including north China, and which have been attributed to the early Bronze Age. For data on the petroglyphs of Qinghai, see Chayet, pp. 64,65.

In a cavern in Ru thog in far western Tibet, paintings have not yet been identified because they are covered by Buddhist motifs. In 1985, also in Ru thog county in Ri mo gdong near the village of Ri gsum, 30 kilometers from the county seat, petroglyphs were discovered on the flank of a mountain. Precise dates for these petroglyphs have not yet been established. They have been divided into four groups. Animals portrayed include goats, wild goats. yaks, dogs, wolves, wild sheep, antelopes, bears, leopards and lions. In the second group, a fascinating montage depicts men on horseback, the sun and moon, ten pots, a yak, fish and rows of unidentified figures. In the third group, hourglass-shaped human figures are engaged in hunting and herding. In the final group, deer and other animals appear to be related in style to the rock carvings found at Chilas and Minar gah in the Indus gorge of northern Pakistan, which exhibits a Saka influence. In the village of rDo dmar in Ru thog, paintings made with a red mineral pigment were found on a boulder. These include solar symbols, a swastika, a sun and moon, and what might be a tree flanked by dots. For data on the petroglyphs of Ru thog, see Chayet, pp. 64-68.

In La dwags and Zangs dkar archaic petroglyphs are found at various sites. They were first reported by Francke near the turn of the century at a site called Drangtse in La dwags, which consisted of thousands of petroglyphs primarily of ibex and yak (Francke: 58). It is believed that Andronovian and Saka-Siberean steppe peoples were present in the region from the Bronze Age to at least the 4th century B.C.E. and were responsible for the earlier rock carvings. Like Gilgit and Hunza, La dwags and Zans dkar in the Bronze Age were connected to the steppe cultures in the second millennium and the first half of the first millennium B.C.E. The Okunevo culture arrived in the area before the Iron Age horsemen, and some mascoids attributed to them may be as early as the Neolithic. In the Iron Age, the Inner Asian Animal style of ornamentation spread throughout Central Asia but with local variations. The Animal style is one component of the Saka triad, which includes the depiction of horse, rider and archery. This style of rock carving also spread to the upper Indus valley, far western Tibet and La dwags. The nomads of the first millennium B.C.E. steppe lands were culturally wedged between Achaemenid Persia and the Zhou civilization of western China. La dwags and Zans dkar were culturally related to both of these major spheres of influence, and the similarity

of forms between certain petrogylphs in the region and Zhou bronzes has been established.

Historical and archaeological analyses of rock carvings from the region have yielded fairly reliable manufacture dates for a few of them. For example, an ibex or gazelle hunting scene with bow and arrows found in La dwags is thought to belong to a Bronze Age series. A rock carving found at Choksti, Zans dkar, depicting two deer flanking a herd of four or five horses along with two or three dogs or wolves, has also been tentatively dated using the same methodologies. The horses have been dated to the Bronze Age and belong to the Prjevalski's breed, and the deer show an affinity with a jade pendant dated to the 9th century B.C.E. excavated in Kazakhstan. Deer with an 'S'-shaped design in their bodies found at Mato, La dwags (like animals of the Ri mo gdong site), are thought to date from the Iron Age. At Al lci in La dwags, Saka style petroglyphs are clearly older than the Buddhist mchod rten that share the same rock surfaces. For information on the Petroglyphs of Zans dkar and La dwags, see Francfort, Klodzinski and Mascale; Francfort. For an analysis of Tibetan language rock inscriptions and petroglyphs depicting stupas in La dwags, see Giacomello.

Petroglyphs were documented by the author in sPi ti in January, 1994, in the sPi ti river gorge not far from the border with Khu nu. These carvings are chronologically diverse and depict a variety of animals including the ibex. Lion or leopard motifs bear a strong resemblance to the rock carvings of Ri mo gdong in western Tibet and at Al lci, as do some of the ungulates. The petroglyphs found in sPi ti push the southern limits of Sakian cultural penetration in the Himalaya to at least the 32nd parallel.

The cave paintings of central and peninsular India are very different in tone and content from those found in the western Himalaya and Tibet. For a survey of non-Himalaya Indian cave paintings from the Paleolithic to the historic period, including an extensive bibliography, see Pandey.

In northern Pakistan, the Indus valley petroglyphs exhibit a sophistication not found in the Gilgit-Pamir complex nor anywhere else in the region (Jettmar: vii,viii). The valleys of the Hindu Kush, Pamirs and the western Himalaya form the southeastern margin of the Eurasian Animal style (Jettmar: ix). Branches of the silk roads from Sogdiana and Khotan have passed through northern Pakistan since the Bronze Age. From the fifth to the second millennium B.C.E., scenes of hunting dominated the petroglyphic compositions. Prey is depicted larger than life size and figures are often bi-triangular. Mask-like petroglyphs divided into quadrants also date from this early period. In the first millennium B.C.E., western Iranian Scythian and Saka motifs were introduced. These are associated with the Eurasian animal style and secondary adaptations of it. As an art form, this style appears to have persisted for a long time. From around the 1st to the 8th century, Buddhism enjoyed a golden era in the region. In this period, inscriptions in Brahmi, Sogdian, Chinese, Kharoshti and Tibetan appeared reflecting the cosmopolitan flavor of the region. In the 9th and 10th centuries, anti-Buddhist currents led to a rougher and narrower range of themes made by an illiterate people. For an excellent background

on the rock carvings of northern Pakistan, see Jettmar and Thewalt.

Beginning in 1985 in Ru thog county, petroglyphs have been discovered by modern researchers at nearly 60 sites across the Tibetan plateau. Most of these sites have been found on the Byang thang. The majority of this rock art consists of the engraved type but paintings have also been discovered. At rDo dmar, in addition to symbolic motifs, animals and an anthropomorphic figure were painted. Ten kilometers from the township headquarters of sMad pa in Shen rtsa county, animals and anthropomorphic figures were painted and some subsequently were obscured by a large g.yung drung. There is also a unique design which looks like the a three-pointed crown worn by the Bon deity Sangs po 'bum khri and Central Asian kings. At another site in sMad pa township, yaks, eagles, antelopes, asses, human figures and symbols including a sun and moon are arrayed around a Bon g.yung drung. The art of engraving rocks continued into the historic period, as an inscription written in Tibetan along side a pictorial petroglyph demonstrates (Suolang: no. 120). For a general survey of the rock art of Tibet, complete with 236 color photographs, see *Art of Tibetan Rock Paintings*.

In August, 1995, the author discovered an unpublished petroglyphic site. The site is located in the sMad chu (dMu chu) valley in Ngam ring county approximately two kilometers upstream of the village of Lung dmar. The site is comprised of at least five boulders. On one boulder about 10 figures are engraved including linear and curvilinear designs and men on horseback. One of the men on horseback is facing backwards and shooting a bow and arrow. On the opposite side of the trail a mounted rider chasing big game is depicted. Two other boulders only have single, indistinct figures, while on a fifth, profusely engraved boulder the figures are worn. The sMad chu site, while not very significant in terms of content, is the first site in this region of Tibet to be reported. The sMad chu valley was an important Zhang zhung center and has a close historical and economic association with adjoining Nag tshang.

Long before the Sakas and Scythians moved across Inner Asia, the art of rock carving was flourishing throughout the region. The broad parallels found in the style and content of these petroglyphs can be attributed to the common steppe and montane environment which engendered a spectrum of analogous adaptive economic strategies, such as big game hunting and pastoralism.

Appendix Two

The domestication of animals, which began at the end of the Pleistocene in various parts of the world, revolutionized human development. For a global perspective on the domestication of animals, see Brock 1992. As Byang thang society has primarily revolved around pastoralism for millennia, it is important to place this subsistence pattern into an archaeological model that accounts for its origins and development. It has been conjectured that as early as 9,000 years ago bands of hunters developed a mobile pastoral culture in Tibet and by 5,000 years ago it was flourishing (Tarthang Tulku 1986: 95). The transition from a hunting and gathering economy to a pastoral way of life had tremendous ramifications for the people and culture of the Byang thang. However, it did not alter the course of civilization as much as it did in the Yellow River valley of China or other agrarian civilizations because herding on the Byang Thang developed primarily in the absence of agriculture. Furthermore, traditional game remained relatively plentiful on the Byang thang, which allowed hunting as a relict cultural trait.

It is not precisely known when herding and the domestication of yaks, goats and sheep arrived on the Byang thang. The abundance of wild quarry suggests that it was developed later than in adjoining regions, where stocks of wild animals became depleted as early as the Neolithic due to environmental and demographic changes. Regarding the domestication of animals in Central Asia, there are two schools of thought among archaeologists. One sees it as the result of a cultural diffusion from the Middle East, while the other views it as an indigenous innovation. Recent breakthroughs in Central Asian archaeology supports the latter theory.

The first domesticated sheep may have appeared in southwest Asia around 9,000 years ago (Ryder: 3). In the lower Indus valley, the domestication of goats, sheep and cattle began around 7,500 years ago (Mughal: 222,223). Evidence found at the mKhar ro Neolithic site in Khams suggests that cattle as well as pigs might have been reared (Chayet: 46). In Neolithic northern China, domesticated pigs and dogs and to a lesser degree, goats, sheep and cattle, have been discovered at the Neolithic Yang shao and Lung shan sites (Watson: 393-395).

The conventional view is that the domestication of hoofed animals occurs only after a people have a vegetable food surplus and a relatively sedentary lifestyle (Brock: 115-118). This view, however, is contested by Mongolian archaeologists. They are of the opinion that Stone Age hunters lived in permanent sites for tens or even hundreds of years when environmental conditions were favorable, and that the transition to cattle breeding arose from the hunting and gathering milieu. In Mongolia, the horse and bull were domesticated by Neolithic tribes. In the Bronze Age, these tribes formed more complex societies based on pastoralism. There is petroglyphic evidence which indicates that cattle breeding in Mongolia dates to the Mesolithic (8,000 years ago) and that it represents a center of cattle breeding. In addition to cattle, Mongolia and Central Asia might also have been an original center for the domestication of sheep, goats and horses,

because the wild ancestors of many domestic animals are found here and the steppe land environment insured year-round pasturage. In Mongolia, cattle descended from the aurochs and sheep from argali, as evidenced in shared morphological peculiarities. This is corroborated by other researchers, who believe that the argali probably did contribute towards the domestication of Asiatic breeds of sheep (Ryder: 15). See Cevendorz for data on the domestication of animals in Mongolia. Less has been published on the yak then any other domesticated animal, and virtually nothing is known about the early stages of its domestication. In 1963, at the Bronze Age site of Nuomuhang located in Qinghai, a pair of yak horns were found along with a crudely made ceramic figure identified as a yak. See Olsen for data on the domestication of the yak.

Appendix Three

In the last 40 years, discoveries of Stone Age culture in Tibet have been mounting. One major center of these discoveries is the Byang thang, where finds ranging from the Middle Paleolithic to the Neolithic (approximately 50,000 to 4,000 years ago) have been documented. Evidence shows that even during the Glacial Age humans lived on the Byang thang, yet very little is known about these early inhabitants and the imprint of Paleolithic man on the Byang thang is tenuous. The paucity of sites and artifacts, the lack of associated organic remains and the mixing of Paleolithic and microlithic sites all point to the need to assume a cautious stance in respect to the origins of man on the Tibetan plateau. Because of the scantiness of the evidence, the anachronistic usage of tools with a Paleolithic typology cannot be ruled out. If a Middle Paleolithic chronology is accurate, hominid development on the Byang thang coincides with the origins of Homo sapiens. In the post-Pleistocene, the climate gradually warmed and acted as a powerful impetus to the settlement of the Byang thang and the development of human society. The latest research carried out by Chinese scientists indicates that Microlithic culture probably evolved from the indigenous Paleolithic culture, which in turn gave rise to a hunting and nomadic culture directly related to contemporary Tibetan culture (Li Yongxian: 22,23). It has not been ascertained when the Stone Age gave way to the Age of Metal on the Byang thang. There are indications that the use of stone implements persisted long after the close of the Neolithic period in adjoining regions.

There is now a trend towards explaining the development of Tibetan culture along autochthonous lines. The implication is that Tibetan culture has been a distinctive and autonomous branch of human civilization from its very foundation. As of yet, no major discoveries of Stone Age implements have been made at the Divine Dyad sites, although they are known from the general vicinity. This might have to do with the age old 'brog pa practice of the using bits of flint or other hard stones as strikers for their flints (me lcags). At the relatively populated Divine Dyad sites, many centuries of this practice may have depleted Stone Age artifacts.

Let us now review a cross-section of Stone Age culture in Tibet. Thirty New and Old Stone Age tools were discovered in gNya' lam, Yali and Yangjuan in 1966. The first major scientific expedition to explore the Byang thang for Stone Age culture was conducted by the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 1976, which collected 355 stone artifacts from Shen rtsa, mTsho gnyis, Ru thog, sPu Hreng and sKyid grong counties. These were dated to the Middle and Late Paleolithic and Mesolithic. Between 1966 and 1986, 40 stone artifacts were discovered in Ding ri county. In northern Tibet, at a place called Geting, stone pits and 109 articles were found including a variety of implements. For a general review of the Stone Age in Tibet, see Gelek; Hu Xu Tru. For a survey of the Stone Age in China, see Kwang, pp. 39-209.

The Paleolithic in Tibet is relatively well represented, although the only data on the subject comes from Chinese publications. Documentation is scant and the methodology

used is often imprecise. Most finds were made randomly. Absolute dates have not been established and results of comparative dating are disappointing. Moreover, the quality of the Chinese publications are poor and can hardly be used to authenticate the claims made. The placement of the Tibetan Paleolithic in the greater Eurasian picture is also wanting. In Shen rtsa county, a Paleolithic site was first discovered in 1976 in the Zhuolole river valley at 4,800 meters by researchers of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. On an alluvium, remnants of 40 worked-stones—the products of direct percussion with pebbles—were recovered. Some of them have part of their core intact. According to Chinese publications, the typology of these implements includes six oval and irregularly shaped scrapers, five rectangular or square scrapers, another type of scraper and two pointed implements. These discoveries have established a link between Zhuolole and Paleolithic sites in north China in Ningxia and Shanxi provinces, and in South China with a site in Yunnan province dating from the Upper Paleolithic. In the Upper Paleolithic in West and East Asia and in Siberia, the simultaneous presence of pebbles, fragments of tools and blades is a characteristic assemblage. The comparison of Zhuolole with dated sites was the basis for the chronology with which it is attributed. However, the Chinese publications are conspicuously bereft of detailed data on the typology of the stone implements found such as relative thickness, facial characteristics and the precise method of manufacture.

Another Paleolithic site discovered in Shen rtsa county is Duogeze, situated at 4,830 meters. It occupies a terrace consisting of layers of gravel above a river bank. Seventy-six objects of worked stone were found. Fifty-four of the objects were made of flint and the remaining ones of agate, quartz and jasper. The artifacts were identified as scrapers with concave, convex and multiple faces, pointed tools, choppers and perhaps knives. Comparisons were drawn with finds from north China and presumably date from the very late Upper Paleolithic. However, published diagrams do not always permit a clear assessment. The identification of the tools is of dubious value because of the inherent difficulties in distinguishing one type from another when dealing with cores and fragments. The identification of one tool as a knife is highly questionable.

Another Shen rtsa site named Luling, southeast of rGya ring mtsho, has also been linked by some analysts to the Paleolithic because of its similarities with lithic material discovered in Lingxia and at Ding ri but documentation is minimal. Another Upper Paleolithic site called Zhabu was discovered in Ru thog county. Twenty-six stone objects were discovered here. For an assessment of these and other Paleolithic sites, see Chayet, pp. 25-34. For a typological comparison with upper Paleolithic sites of the Ordosian culture of northwestern China (Inner Mongolia, Shanxi and Ningxia), see Kwang pp. 61-70.

The transition from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic in Tibet is not well understood. Microliths have been discovered in conjunction with Paleolithic sites and independently in Neolithic sites such as mKhar ro in Khams. It is not known if a Epi-Paleolithic period existed in Tibet. However, microliths are an important link in the evolution from the

Upper Paleolithic to the Neolithic. Since 1956, when the first microliths were discovered at Heihe in the Nag chu prefecture, many sites have been found; 39 between 1984 and 1991. On the Byang thang, microlithic sites have also been discovered in Ru thog, Shen rtsa, mTsho gnyis, dPal mgon and Ngam ring counties. The sites average 5,000 meters above sea level, and the highest at 6,200 meters. Microliths in Shen rtsa and mTsho gnyis counties were found often by local inhabitants. They are made of a variety of materials including flint, jasper and jade, and are cylindrical or conical in shape. Out of 156 reported, 94 have cores. These indicate that the techniques of manufacture had been perfectly mastered. Blades and tools of diverse types have been identified, but much research into typology is needed.

Ceramics have been found coexisting with microliths at mKhar ro and have been dated to circa 3000 B.C.E. for the first stage. Production of microliths probably began at the end of the Paleolithic, but material for establishing a precise date is still lacking. Prototypes of microliths are not found in Tibet, which suggests that the technology was imported from China, where there was a more diverse microlithic culture. It has been established that microlithic production in Central Asia was influenced by West Asia and, in the same far-reaching manner, China may have influenced production in Tibet. It is also possible that Central Asia played a role in the production of microliths in both China and Tibet. The manufacture of microliths in Tibet may have lingered on long after metal implements supplanted them in adjacent countries. For a survey of microlithic culture in Tibet, see Chayet, pp. 34-36.

Neolithic sites are centered in four regions of the plateau: 1) Lhasa and Yar lung; 2) rKong po; 3) Chab mdo; and 4) A mdo. In the agricultural community of mKhar ro, domiciles of one and perhaps two floors were built. In 1984, in the village of Chos gong east of Se ba monastery, a Neolithic site was discovered. Cave dwellings, ash pits, burial articles, ceramics, polished stone implements and bone implements were found. For an excellent synopsis of Neolithic sites, see Chayet, pp. 36-55. A bronze mirror was also excavated at Chos gong. According to Suolang Wangdui of the Administration Commission for Museums and Archaeology Data in Tibet, this mirror included two birds in its design (personal communication). It has been dated by Chinese archaeologists to around 1800 B.C.E. This mirror documents that the Neolithic inhabitants of Chos gong had contact with a Bronze Age culture. In the rDza chu of Chab do prefecture, Neolithic sites have also been found at Yanduo and Xiaoenda (Hu Xue Tru). On the Byang thang, Ri tu, a Neolithic site discovered in Ru thog and dated 2000 to 1000 years B.C.E., has yielded finely polished stone implements and fragments of painted ceramics. (Li Yongxian: 23; Hu xue tru). In northwest China after the climatic optimum of the Middle Holocene, there was a gradual replacement of agrarian cultures with herding cultures (Kwang: 390,395). Such changes, which occurred on the doorstep of the Tibetan plateau in the Neolithic and Chacolithic, may have had a significant impact on Tibetan cultural development.

Discoveries of Paleolithic and Microlithic artifacts on the Byang thang were made

during two wildlife surveys in the region in 1993 and 1994. Under the sponsorship of the Wildlife Conservation Society of New York, the Tibet Plateau Institute of Biology and Tibet Forest Bureau, George Schaller and Dan Miller discovered Paleolithic choppers, fragments, and microliths at several sites on the northern Byang thang. The locations of the two major sites are 1) 87° 10′ E. and 34° 53′N.; and 2) in close proximity to the mTsho gnyis county seat. At another site (88° 40′ E. and 34° 53′ N.) Schaller and Miller discovered an oval-shaped ring of stones embedded in the ground which appeared to be the site of an ancient camp. This information was obtained in personal communication with George Schaller and Dan Miller.

Appendix Four

Traditionally in Tibet there are two series of 28 constellations (rgyu skar), one Bon and the other Buddhist. Among the 12 Bon wise men of King gNya' khri btsan po's court was sKor rtsis mkhan, who described the four seasons as based on the movements of the stars, sun and moon. The cultivation of crops was carried out in accordance with his instructions. The appearance of the constellation sMal po in the Fifth Tibetan Month was used to make predictions about crop fruition. Another traditional test called skyor kha involved the constellation Lag sor, which is shaped like a human hand. Its relative position to the moon is used to predict the next year's weather. The nya drug test was carried out in the tenth lunar month by examining the relative position of the constellation sMin drugs in order to predict the next year's harvest. Ancient Tibetans fixed the solstices and equinoxes and in the reign of King sPu lde gung rgyal a woman named Bal ma established a lunar calendar. See Dunkar Rinpoche 1992, pp. 57-60. Special dates in the lunar calendar were stipulated in the early Bon funerary rites which were celebrated three years after the death of an eminent person (Lalou: 17-19).

The Bon astrological sciences belong to the gShen of the Phywa and, according to tradition, were first taught by gShen rab mi bo che. While China and Tibet share a common astrological system based on the elements, the Tibetan sme ba is derived from an ancient Bon tradition. The sme ba, an astrological symbolism denoting the totality of the cosmos, is based on the numbers one to nine. Ancient Bon practitioners concerned with astrology include 'Tshams bon and sKos bon, and the 'bon of the sun' and 'bon of the moon' were apparently types of astrological calculations. For a survey of the Bon astrological tradition, see Norbu 1995, pp. 147-163. In Bon there is a sky goddess known as Nam mkha' g.yu mdog snang srid mdzod, whose ornaments were the sun, moon and stars, and who caused lightning, hailstorms, thunder and clouds (Tucci 1949: 715). This personification of celestial phenomena gives us some idea of the relationship the ancient Tibetans had with the sky.

In neighboring China, it has been determined from Shang oracle records that an unbroken astronomical tradition goes back to 1450 B.C.E., and the first complete system of calculating the ephemerides was introduced in 104 B.C.E. (Sivin). Pictographs for the constellations Scorpio and Orion originate from the latter part of the second millennium B.C.E. (Ecsedy et al: 123). Characters and texts from the Chou period (12th century to 3rd century B.C.E.) appear to preserve an astronomical tradition dating from well before the historical period (Ecsedy et al: 123). The *Chou Shi Ching* enumerates agricultural activities related to a ten-month year and a sidereal year based on the star Antares (Ecsedy et al: 124-126) By around 100 B.C.E., it is thought that computational, ritual, mythological and metaphysical elements combined to form the modern Chinese astronomical tradition (Sivin). In ancient China, there were various stellar deities (Werner: 177-179,188,189,191,192,). For example, Shou Hsing, the god of longevity, has been

worshipped regularly since the Han period (207 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.) and is identified with the first two of the 28 constellations, Chio and K'ang (Werner: 171,172). In *A Chronicle of the Five Cycles of Time*, dating from the 3rd century the body of the deity P'an ku was transformed into the various parts of the universe, a common Indo-European mythologem (Birrel: 30,31,190,191).

In India, astronomical tradition is thought to date back to the Vedic Age. In the *Rig Veda*, the sky (dyaus) was a living being and the stars divine beings, and ritam was the grand cosmic order closely associated with law truth and the sky. Gods (deva) resided in the highest heaven (dyu) and were gods of time, which subsequently became identified with Mahakala or Mahadeva. Aditi, the mother of the gods (Devamata), was identified with the star Pollux (Punarvasu) and was integral to the development of the prehistoric lunar calendar. For a description of the Indian astronomical tradition, see Roy. Ancient Iran in the Median and Achaemenian periods likewise had a sophisticated calendrical system. For a description of the Iranian astronomical tradition, see Hartner.

Appendix Five

Graves with and without mounds are an outstanding feature of the cultures of Bronze Age and Iron Age in Eurasia. Analogous graves exist on the Tibetan plateau but they have been relatively poorly studied and documented. It is for this reason that, save for funerary mounds found on the northeastern edge of the plateau, it is still not understood how Tibetan specimens specifically relate to the cultural patterns discerned in other regions of Asia.

The first person to scientifically catalog graves on the Tibetan plateau was A. H. Francke in the early 20th century. Pit graves believed to have belonged to a pre-Buddhist group called the Mon were found in La dwags, as well as Dardic tombs. At Rong and Leh, stone graves contained human bones on boards or in ceramic vessels were discovered, as were bronze implements and even fragments of iron and gold. Francke believed these tombs to be connected the Empire of the Western Women, which was thought to have extended into Khotan, La dwags, western Tibet and Chamba. Francke's discoveries are detailed in *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*. In the Liddar valley of Kashmir, graves that resemble those discovered in La dwags have been found to bear copper, shell, and pottery grave goods have been found (Shali: 93). In Lahoul (Lho yul) and sPi ti, graves containing ceramic vessels full of bones have been unearthed (Tshe ring rDo rje in personal communication). In various villages of Khu nu human remains, ceramics and gzi stones have been found.

The next big discovery of was made by the Russian-born Tibetologist George Roerich. One of the objectives of George Roerich's 1920s Central Asiatic Expedition was to explore nomad barrows and to this end they were successful. The expedition managed to locate barrows in the Altai, Western Turkestan, Mongolia, and Tibet and established that an ancient link existed between Tibet and the Scytho-Siberians of Inner Asia. The expedition found tombs and arrow heads at Rato in Shen rtsa county and megalithic monuments at several other places on the Byang thang, including Do ring in dPal mgon county. For a synopsis of these finds, see Roerich 1967, pp. 20-28, 119-122. During his expeditions to Tibet, Professor Tucci also discovered a variety of megalithic monuments which he opined were megalithic tombs.

In addition to hundreds of tombs with tumuli (bang so), many of the cist type have now been discovered throughout Tibet. For example, in 1984 a necropolis of 275 cists was found in Nyag rong in the Sichuan province which yielded stone, bronze, bark and bone objects, and fragments of textiles. Tombs were of various types and with corpses buried in diverse ways. These tombs, in two distinct phases, have been dated to the first millennium B.C.E. Important finds have been made in the Qinghai and Gansu provinces that belong to the Bronze Age Qijia, Xindian and Nuomohong cultures, as well as others. A great wealth of osteological remains and artifacts have been discovered. The diversity and frequency of the finds has made the Bronze Age graves of northeastern Tibet the

best documented part of plateau archaeology. For information on these discoveries, see Chayet, pp.60- 63.

Neolithic cists have been discovered at Xiaoenda, Motuo and Nying khri in eastern Tibet and at rTsa mda' in far western Tibet. Chinese archaeologists call the pre-Imperial Yar lung dynasty the Tubod period, which they date from approximately 200 B.C.E. to 629. From data compiled through the excavation of tombs, they have divided this period into four phases which, from earliest to latest, are Xiangpi, Dubod, Qugong and Punugou. The accuracy of this system of classification should be seriously called into question; nevertheless, it is a first attempt to develop a scientific chronology. In the Xiangpi township in the Qamdo (Chab mdo) prefecture, 1200 square meters of tombs have been excavated which are either circular or rectangular in shape and made of flat stones. Ceramic and bronze burial articles have been found at Xiangpi. In Lingzhi (Nying khri), seven burial grounds of stone-lined rectangular graves have yielded human skeletons, polished stone implements, and ceramics. The Qugong phase is represented at the Chos gong site in Lhasa. In the late Tubod Punugou phase polished stone implements, ceramics, bronze and iron articles, buckwheat and barley were found. For a Chinese analysis of the archaeology of Tibetan tombs, see Hu xue tru.

Among the ancient Bon po, there was a practice of offering ransom sacrifices to protect the lives of individuals. This included human sacrifice in some cases. The Bon po were buried with various objects needed in the hereafter, and animals and humans were sometimes sacrificed to act as companions for the deceased. Complex rituals were associated with kingly burial mounds in Zhang zhung. The futility of human sacrifice is illustrated in the tale of the Bon po priest, Khri bsang. See Kvaerne 1985. Textual reference to the dead being buried with valuables is found in the *mNga' ris rgyal rabs*. According to this text, the custom was abandoned in western Tibet at the time of the second diffusion of Buddhism. See Vitali 1996, p. 110. In an early Bon royal soul ransom ritual, it records that clothes, cakes, weapons, bedding, objects for the journey (byes), food, beverages, furniture and precious objects were placed among other things in a well (gtang)(Lalou: 17-19).

Throughout Central Asia stone and earth hills were erected over graves called kurgans. Scythian and Sakian Mounds belonging to rulers of large tribal confederacies and the nomadic aristocracy were as tall as 20 meters, as wide as 60 meters, and were often filled with gold. Herodotus accurately records that a Scythian king was buried with one of his concubines, several servants and horses. The common man was buried in kurgans barely one meter tall which bore lance points, arrows and simple swords. For Scythian and Sakian kurgans, see Pavlinskaya: 30-35. The Huns (3rd century B.C.E. to 6th century) and the Turkic tribes (6th century to 12th century) also left graves of their own. For an overview of Hunic culture, including their burial practices, see Lubo-Leswnichenko, and for the Turks, see Vainshtein.

Appendix Six

It is generally believed that in a few places on each of the major land masses, between 9000 and 12,000 years ago, cultivation of cereal and root crops began and that agriculture spread from these areas almost to its modern geographical limits (Hole: 374). The first definite signs of plant cultivation began in the Near East in a string of Early Neolithic villages (6000 to 8000 B.C.E.) where six-rowed barley and two types of wheat were cultivated (Zohary: 36). Although the origins of agriculture in the Dang ra and rTa rgo region is not yet documented, there is little reason to believe that it was a recent development. In *Tibetan Chronicles*, there is a reference to agriculture not being widely practiced until the time of the ninth Tibetan king, Pu lde gung rgyal (Tarthang Tulku 1986: 93). However, agriculture was practiced in Tibet in certain places (such as the Lhasa valley and eastern Tibet) since the Neolithic.

There are about 30 Neolithic domesticated plant sites in China and there is incontrovertible evidence for plant cultivation in north China by the Middle Neolithic (6500 to 5000 B.C.E.)(Crawford: 8,13,14). The precise environmental conditions in which plant domestication began in north China is not known but it has been established that north China was warmer and more moist in the Middle Holocene (5500 to 1000 B.C.E.) then it is today (Crawford: 10-12). By 6000 B.C.E., agricultural communities were established in south central Gansu province (Crawford: 15,16) adjacent to the Tibetan plateau.

Barley and bread wheat probably arrived in China from southwest Asia by the third millennium B.C.E. (Crawford: 8). Hordeum spontaneum, the wild relative of cultigen barley found in Tibet, may be the progenitor of Chinese naked barley (Crawford: 21). The evolution and origin of barley on the Tibetan plateau is believed to have taken place in three stages: 1) Two-rowed wild barley—the oldest ancestor; 2) six-rowed wild barley (Hordeum agriocrithon)—intermediate stage; and 3) cultivated barley (Shao and Li: 1350). Wild barley on the plateau was probably used for a long time as fodder, wine and food, and is similar to primitive cultivars (Shao and Li: 1350). According to the Xizang provincial museum, there are thousands of genetic strains of barley cultivated in Tibet, traditionally classified according to color (red, white and black), ripening period (85-120 days), and morphology. Wheat and barley were introduced to the Indian subcontinent by the beginning of the fourth millennium B.C.E., perhaps from Central Asia (Willcox: 139). However, other findings indicate that cultivation began even earlier. In the Neolithic site of Mehrgarh in Baluchistan (6000 to 5000 B.C.E.) the earliest evidence for an agricultural plant economy on the subcontinent was found, including six-rowed and two-rowed barley (Kajale: 170). Evidence of early agricultural activities in Kashmir is found at the Gufkral site, dating from 2950 B.C.E. to 1200 B.C.E. where six-rowed barley (Hordeum vulgare) among other crops, was cultivated (Kajale: 159,171). In the Shortughai site in Afghanistan (third to second millennium B.C.E.), the most common

crop discovered was six-rowed barley (Willcox: 145).

In Central Asia, agriculture was being practiced by the beginning of the sixth millennium B.C.E. (Willcox: 139; Lisitsina: 350). In Aeneolithic and Early Bronze Age Central Asia (middle fourth millennium B.C.E. to beginning of second millennium B.C.E.), simple irrigation systems, including reservoirs, appeared through the efforts of individual settlements. The Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age in Central Asia (second and beginning of first millennium B.C.E.) are characterized by the development of complex irrigation systems. For information on the development of irrigation systems in Central Asia, see Lisitsina.

Appendix Seven

Although no scientific studies appear to have been carried out at Dang ra or gNam mtsho, the paleoclimatology and paleogeography of the region can be extrapolated from studies made at other sites on the Byang thang. The Dang ra basin in the Middle Holocene climatic optimum supported scrub forests of coniferous and deciduous species. Lake levels were meters higher, the glaciers were longer, and the volume of water entering the lakes was much larger. The warmer climate and the greater availability of water made the Dyads far more hospitable and productive environments than they presently are.

A glaciological study of the southern slopes of the West K'un-lun mountains (northwestern extreme of Byang thang), one of greatest areas of glaciation on the Tibetan plateau, was conducted by a Sino-Japanese scientific expedition in the mid 1980s. The expedition discovered that there were no glaciers in the study region in the Early Pleistocene, but that they reached their maximum extent in the Middle Pleistocene. In the last interglacial period of the Late Pleistocene, the region was warm and semi-humid. During the last period of glaciation, approximately 14000 B.C.E., a cold montane desert steppe prevailed. The climate then gradually shifted at the close of the Pleistocene becoming warm and semi-arid and a steppe with scrub developed. Beginning about 700 B.C.E., there was a colder period of Neoglaciation and evidence for a 'Little Ice Age' (ca. 15th to 17th centuries). In the modern period, the climate and vegetation of this harshest corner of the plateau has reverted to a cold montane desert steppe. The expedition found that ice sheets were once as much as twice as large as today and the ancient Tianshuihai lake was 80 kilometers long and 10 kilometers wide, while now there are only small salt lakes and a lacustrine plain. Recently, most glaciers in the area have been retreating. For the findings of the Sino-Japanese, study see Higuchi.

In a book by Han Tonglin, the climatic and biotic changes on the Byang thang are elucidated. At gNam mtsho and other lakes on the Byang thang, the depressions underwent glaciation before evolving into lakes. Evidence includes glacial boulders, glaciated hills and drumlins (oval or elongated hills composed of glacial debris) found in the region. In the Early Holocene (8000 to 5500 B.C.E.), the global climate turned warmer, plants developed, swamps grew and basins were filled with meltwater on the Byang thang. In the Middle Holocene (5500 to 3000 B.C.E.), the Byang thang experienced an optimal climate. Glaciers ablated further and meltwater filled up almost all the lake basins and broad valleys. This was the pan-lake period. Peat layers, widely seen on the high plateau, formed during this time. Sporopollens were extremely abundant and there was a significant increase in woody pollens. In the Late Holocene (3000 B.C.E. to present), neoglaciation ended the climactic optimum of the Middle Holocene. Studies of glaciers in southeast Inner Tibet show three intervals of glacial advancement in the Late Holocene as determined by Carbon 14 and lichenometric testing. For an overview of climate change on the Byang thang, see Han Tonglin, pp. 88-94.

The findings of a palynological study conducted on the Byang thang by Huang Ci-xuan and Liang Yu-lian are consistent with the glaciological studies. The study concluded that in the Early Holocene there was a wide distribution of shrub steppe over the plateau. In the Middle Holocene, the Byang thang was characterized by shrub steppe while in southern Tibet the warm humid climate favored forest and shrub. At present and in the Holocene, the flora of the Tibetan plateau consisted of elements from Central Asia and southwest China. In this study, samples of widely distributed Holocene sediments of various types were taken. In mTsho chen (only 130 kilometers west of Dang ra) at an elevation of 4,675 meters, Late Holocene fine grey-yellow sediments bore sporopollens from Ephedra and Artemisia (common species in the contemporary period). Middle Holocene grey-yellow, silty sub-clay sediments with relic plants bore sporopollens from Pinus (pine), Betula (birch), Cyperaceae (juniper) and Artemesia. Herb sporopollens made up 56-73 percent of the total samples. At Chagam Caka (Gra tshang tshwa kha?) near Tshwa kha in dGe rgyas county, black mud sediments bore Tamaricaceae, Alnus, Pinus, Ephedra, Artemisia and very small amounts of Picea and Abies. See Huang Ci-xuan, Liang Yu-lian.

Another study conducted at gSum bzhi mtsho in northwestern Tibet by European researchers found that in the Early and Middle Holocene (8000 to 3000 B.C.E.) water levels were high and there was an increase in vegetal cover. See Gasse et al. Another paper, which takes a much wider look at the development of the climate of Tibet, includes the Pliocene, Pleistocene and Holocene Epochs. It estimated that in the Middle Holocene the average temperature was three or four degrees centigrade higher than today, and four to five degrees higher than in the period of neoglaciation. See Wang Fu-bao et al.

Conclusion

Throughout this study we have seen how the lake and mountain deities of the Divine Dyads participate in the cultural life of the Tibetans. This participation especially permeates the religion and mythology of the 'brog pa and circumscribes their sense of space, order and well being. Beginning with gNyan chen thang lha and gNam mtsho, we traced the mythology, iconography and doctrinal status of these deities. This was followed by an examination of the ritual structures erected around these deities. The process of elucidating the complex personalities and cultural representations was then repeated for rTa rgo rin po che and Dang ra g.yu mtsho.

We analyzed the historical development of the deities of the Divine Dyads by examining their conceptual evolution from primitive numina to integrated members of the Bon and Buddhist pantheons. This ordering of the make-up of the deities along temporal lines was accomplished by organizing textual, archaeological and ethnographic data to reflect Tibetan cultural development. Rather than placing all the materials into the well-worn conceptual boxes of popular and lamaist traditions, we have sought a perspective which encompasses the complexity of cultural development and the convolutions of time in Tibet. The premise of this work is that critical treatment of the scope and nature of this material herein will yield a theoretical template for inquiry into the origins and development of Tibetan culture.

As we saw in the aboriginal tradition, the Divine Dyads represent autochthonous deities incumbent in the mountains and lakes. These deities not only embody topographical features but, through the mechanism of the soul force, are ramified into animals and a range of lesser physical objects. Thus epiphanic forms developed which allowed the 'brog pa to not only behold the Divine Dyads in human form but to actually become their mouthpieces. This tradition of spirit-mediumship borrowed from the Divine Dyads and helped to develop their personalities. Spirit-mediumship of the Divine Dyads has continued to the present day and is based on a belief that these deities play an instrumental role in the everyday life and fortune of the 'brog pa. Consequently, the aboriginal deities of the Divine Dyads are closely related to the pastoral and hunting economy. This is borne out in the manifold links between the mountain and lake spirits, and the way of life of the 'brog pa. Lastly, in aboriginal tradition, the deities of the Divine Dyads are important cosmogonic and etiological figures, as the orally transmitted myths demonstrate.

The Bon religion in both its early and assimilated forms is widely represented among the deities of the Divine Dyads. As we saw, the theogonies for the four principal mountain and lake deities have been recorded in 11th and 12th century Bon texts. In these theogonies the deities are related to fundamental Bon concepts such as space, duality, the tripartite universe and the swastika. The deities of the Divine Dyads are well

represented in Bon's cosmological, liturgical, metaphysical and ritual components. Their identification with Bon is evident in their iconography, their significance to Bon po luminaries, and their role in the rDzogs chen and tantric traditions. Especially in its early form, Bon emphasized the efficacy of apotropaic and fortune-bestowing rites and this is visible in the Bon traditions pertaining to the Divine Dyads. Both of the Dyad sites are key to the geographical and historical heritage of both the Bon religion and the Zhang zhung kingdom, and for this reason Dang ra g.yu mtsho and, to a lesser extent gNam mtsho, have become synonymous with their distinguishing features.

The introduction and diffusion of Buddhism is well illustrated by the deities of the Divine Dyads. It is believed that from the time of Gu ru rin po che, they were brought under the auspices of the new religion. Although this is not accepted by the Bon po, it is a pervasive belief among the majority Buddhist community in Tibet. Over the centuries, as the Divine Dyads became identified with Buddhism, they assumed its doctrinal and iconographic character. Particularly with gNam mtsho and gNyan chen thang lha, the Divine Dyads became conjoined with a variety of Buddhist gods and goddesses. Buddhism also attempted to domesticate the mountain and lake deities by forcing them to be less capricious and savage, although this attempt met with only limited success due to the persistence of antecedent traditions. Buddhism occupies the apex of the syncretic structure of the Divine Dyads, and constitutes the least environment-based approach to sacred geography and indigenous deities. Although it must still contend with aboriginal and Bon traditions, Buddhism is steadily coming to dominate the culture of the gNam mtsho-gNyan chen thang lha Dyad. Even at Dang ra g.yu mtsho, Buddhist beliefs and doctrine have infiltrated the culture with the resultant attenuation of the earlier traditions.

We examined the findings of the field surveys conducted at the Dyad sites, as well as a wide range of ethnographic, archaeological and geographical material. These surveys clearly illustrate that concepts relating to the deities of the Divine Dyads are inextricably related to topography and patterns of land use. In the field surveys close attention has been paid to the formative role that the Divine Dyads occupy in the sacred and physical geography of the Byang thang. In essence, we saw that the lakes, their shorelines, and the adjoining mountains and plains are wielded together into a conceptual whole whose central point is the Divine Dyads.

Less clear is the role and function of the archaeological sites and cave paintings surveyed. Directly relating them to the deities of the Divine Dyads is a tentative approach at best. By virtue of their location, these ancient physical and aesthetic features are spatially related to the Divine Dyads. However, the cultural ties they may have once had with the lake and mountain deities are beyond the scope of this inquiry. We must await further archaeological research in the hope that it will augment our understanding of the interconnections between the deities of the Divine Dyads and ancient monuments and paintings.

In this work about 30 sites attributed to the pre-Buddhist period were documented.

The ancient temples, forts, megaliths and other structures allude to the depth of civilization on the Byang thang and will provide a key to improving our knowledge of early Tibet. Detailed archaeological investigation of these is urgently needed. By utilizing modern scientific techniques such as portable radar, microwave imagery, ultrasound detection and spectography, a great deal could be learned about the archaeology of the Divine Dyads; and this is possible without excavating even a handful of dirt. This work, however, hinges on the seriousness and resolve of the academic community and the representative governments. Further research is also dependent on the forging of mutually beneficial ties between researchers and the 'brog pa.

A priority of the field surveys was to catalogue the cave art found at gNam mtsho; compositions representing a wealth of themes found in a number of caves are organized according to typology and location. Ethnographic research demonstrates that most of the prehistoric paintings fall outside the contemporary cultural ambit. However, that which remains alive in the Tibetan consciousness affords a lucid perspective on ancient culture in the region. To supplement this ethnographic approach, cross-cultural comparisons with the rock art of other regions of Inner Asia have been drawn to facilitate the understanding of early 'brog pa representational forms. There remains much work to be carried out, especially in the identification of anthropomorphic figures.

An integral part of the chapters that detail the field surveys was an exposition of the history and physical resources of the monasteries located in the vicinity of the Divine Dyads. Understanding the history of the monasteries is especially important in an environment with few other fixed structures. These monasteries, along with the hermitages, shrines and villages, attest to the importance of the deities of the Divine Dyads as well as the richness of the region's cultural heritage. The findings of the field surveys establish that a holistic relationship exists between the physical environment and lore of the sacred mountains and lakes.

Throughout this book a number of important patterns in 'brog pa culture were considered. Soul animals and objects, spirit mediums, orally preserved creation myths, and clan, ancestral and etiological deities were discovered to be crucial to the understanding of how the deities of the Divine Dyads evolved. Often such components of what is loosely termed "popular culture" have been neglected by researchers in favor of the "high culture" of lamaism. It is hoped that this study has helped to demonstrate the value of research centered around indigenous culture.

Virtually all of prehistoric Tibet remains open to inquiry. For instance, are we to assume that the apotheosis of the Divine Dyads began with the dawn of human inhabitation on the Byang thang? This is an expansive question when one remembers that potentially tens of thousands of years of the human legacy must be accounted for. Even the broad proto-historical and historical phases of Byang thang culture are far from clear, which precludes us from chronologizing many traditions associated with the Divine Dyads. A fundamental question is: when did Bon begin transforming the aboriginal Divine Dyads into protective and tutelary deities reflective of its philosophical

and doctrinal refinement? Such questions will not be easy to resolve. The problem of chronology is only compounded if we take it as axiomatic that cultural development of the Divine Dyads is based on concomitant developments in economy, technology, and social and political organization. Pérhaps the most graphic symbol of this cultural complexity is the superimposing of one painting upon another in the caves of gNam mtsho, for this signifies that new concepts and traditions continually supersede earlier ones.

This study raises many specific questions about the status of prehistoric Tibet and the origins of the diverse traditions connected to the Divine Dyads. Only through advances in textual studies, archaeology and anthropology will we discover answers to some of these questions and, in the process, enhance our knowledge of ancient civilization in Tibet. It seems only a matter of time before a concerted effort on the part of researchers will dispel the gloom obscuring Tibet's remote past and brighten the future study of Tibetan civilization.

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